PLAYS *of the* NATURAL *and the* SUPERNATURAL

BY

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I

THE GIRL IN THE COFFIN

Characters

William Magnet, *a foreman of loom workers.*
John Ferguson, *a strike leader.*
Mrs. Mamie Shaefer, *a striker's wife.*
Mrs. Margaret Rickert, *another striker's wife.*
Mrs. Hannah Littig, *an old woman.*
Nicholas Blundy, *a young mill worker.*
Timothy McGrath, *a member of the strikers' executive committee.*

Time: *Between seven and eight o'clock of an early spring evening.*

Place: *A large mill town.*

THE GIRL IN THE COFFIN

Scene

The parlor of William Magnet's *house, which is that of a well-to-do workingman. At the left is a door leading outside to the porch. On either side of the door are windows, with blinds drawn and heavy coarse white lace curtains. To the right is a wooden mantel with a plush lambrequin, an ornamental clock, a gilded plaster cast and a photograph in a celluloid frame. Over the mantel hangs a large "crayon portrait" of a woman in a heavy silvered frame. Toward the rear is a door leading to the dining room and the kitchen. In one corner stands a cheap mahogany upright piano with silk drapery hung over one corner. A large highly decorated vase and a chromo under glass representing St. Cecelia playing to the angels (this picture supported by a bracket) ornament the top of the piano. To the right of it is a standing lamp (unlighted when the curtain rises). Near this are three tiers of section bookcases filled with "sets." Under the window at the left is a small*

upholstered plush sofa with a sofa cushion made of cigar ribbons. In middle of the back wall hangs a large framed lithograph portrait of John Ferguson, *strike leader, standing in an oratorical attitude. A real silk flag with gilt lettering and gilt fringe is draped over one corner of this portrait. On the floor directly below this picture—far enough out so that there is room to pass between it and the wall—stands a black coffin on trestles. The pallid profile and thick dark hair of a dead woman are barely visible.*

To the right of the stage toward the front stands a small oak table with a lace cover and a large oil lamp with a painted china shade giving a dim light.

Mrs. Mamie Shaefer *is discovered seated to the left of the table in a straight chair, crocheting lace edging. She is stout, neat, vigorous, red-cheeked, her hair brushed tightly back. She is dressed in tight-fitting black merino. To her left,* Mrs. Margaret Rickert *occupies a cane-seated rocker. She also is stout and rosy, but of a more placid type. She wears a brown shawl and over her head a knitted scarf of pink wool. While* Mrs. Rickert *rocks and* Mrs. Shaefer *crochets, enter from the dining room door* Mrs. Littig, *a little, thin, pale, vapid-looking old*

woman with scraggly gray hair, a gray calico dress and a small woolen shawl over her shoulders. She walks across the stage and lights the lamp by the piano.

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Looking up from her crocheting.*]
Has Magnet come in yet, Mrs. Littig?

MRS. LITTIG

[*Busy with the lamp-lighting.*]
No, he ain't come in. (*She speaks in a mild, high, patient voice.*)

MRS. SHAEFER

Where did he say he was goin'?

MRS. LITTIG

He didn't say. Most like he went to the cemetery.

MRS. SHAEFER

It's queer he wouldn't be back by now.

MRS. RICKERT

He might be at the depot to meet Ferguson's train. A quarter past seven he gets here. The crowds was thick already when I come up the street.

MRS. SHAEFER

To be sure, that's where he is. Are you gettin' somethin' to eat, Mrs. Littig? Magnet'll need a good hot bite in case he goes to the hall.

MRS. LITTIG

There's coffee made and ham and eggs ready to fry ef he'll eat.

MRS. RICKERT

[*To* Mrs. Littig.]

Poor man, he ain't much appetite, I expect.

MRS. LITTIG

No, he don't eat very good.

[*When* Mrs. Littig *has finished lighting the lamp, she walks to the coffin and stands, facing the audience, stroking her cheek and wiping her eyes now and then with her hand. She is disregarded by the others, who go on talking. After a moment or two she goes out by the dining room door.*]

MRS. RICKERT

I understand he takes it terrible hard, Mrs. Shaefer. My Jim met him on the street last night, and he says to him: "Magnet," he says, "I'm sorry trouble

should 'a' come to you of all men in this town just at this time," he says, "when so many looks to you for help." And with that Magnet just give him a nod and walked on without a word to say. Jim was tellin' me he had a terrible look on his face like he was near to lose his senses. "It was a bad day for the workers o' this town, Maggie," Jim says to me, "when Magnet's girl took sick. You want to remember," he says, "let the Tabitha run another week and this strike's lost; and run it will," he says, "as sure as I'm alive, without Magnet sticks on the job. Ferguson's a wonder," he says, "but he can't do everything alone. It's a shame for Magnet to draw out just now—there ain't nothin' ought to make him do it," he says.

MRS. SHAEFER

I heard say they got a message last night from Ferguson, one o' them secret telegrams. "The Tabitha walks out at noon Saturday," he says, "or the game's up. Drive them damn scabs"—that's what he says right in the telegram—"drive them damn scabs into Murray Hall at half past eight and look for me on the seven fifteen train. *Have Magnet there,*" he says.

[*A slight pause.*]

Ferguson—ain't it surprising, now, what he's done in this town? Ain't he got a terrible strong will?

"He's a great man"—that's what Tim McGrath says to a crowd down there one night. "Talk about your kings and your emperors and your presidents and your millionaires," he says—"there ain't one of 'em all with the brains and the fists could stand up alone against Ferguson."

MRS. RICKERT

It's little Ferguson can do without others to help him. What do them nine-dollar-a-week scabs at the Tabitha know or care who Ferguson is? He can't talk no Eyetalian. He ain't never run a loom. It needs somebody can speak their own tongue and has lived in the same place and worked on the same job. Magnet's the man to talk to them men. Do you think he'll go to the meetin' tonight, Mrs. Shaefer?

MRS. SHAEFER

I don't know, I'm sure, Mrs. Rickert. I'm here to do what I can. "It's his duty," that's what my Joe says to me this mornin'—"it's his duty, and no man ain't got a right to go against his duty, no matter how black his trouble may be. Do you want we should 'a' starved and scraped ten weeks for nothin'?" he says. "Mill after mill will shut down," he says—"the Excelsior down a month since, the Maxwell down a fortnight this coming Wednesday, the Junta down three weeks past—My God, think o' that!" Joe says to me, "the Junta—that miserable

pesthouse o' poor, chatterin' Dago apes that you wouldn't 'a' thought would 'a' ever knew the difference between a strike and a bunch of spaghetti; and here they are holdin' together like human men, and who's done it?" Joe says to me. "Why, old Magnet's done it. Ferguson never could 'a' brought this strike where it is today without Magnet to back him. When the Tabitha shuts down," he says, "we've got the best o' them bloodsuckers that's tryin' to live off our carcasses, an' there's only one man can put a little reason an' backbone into them cowardly sponges o' furren scabs, an' that man's Magnet. Magnet's in a bad place," he says, "with nobody but that one pore foolish old woman"—(*She lowers her voice and motions toward the dining room door.*)—"to look after him. She'd 'a' been in the almshouse long ago ef it hadn't 'a' been for Magnet's good heart. She's nobody to put nerve into a man. Now for God's sake," Joe says to me, "you go down there tonight, Mamie, and see he gets a good meal an' turns up at the hall an' gives his talk accordin' to the timetable. It's a great pity," he says, "*for more reasons than one*, that Magnet's wife is no more alive. That house would 'a' been better this long time past for a good, strong woman in it," he says.

MRS. RICKERT

Seemed like he was terrible devoted to Mary.

MRS. SHAEFER

He made a great mistake to indulge her the way he did, Mrs. Rickert, a great mistake.

MRS. RICKERT

Seems queer she wouldn't 'a' got a man of her own before now—a bright, stylish girl like Mary. There was plenty courted her. They say as young Nick Blundy, that's foreman of the warpers and twisters down at the Waverly, was after her to marry him this long time.

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Severely.*]

She would never 'a' been content to be a mill worker's wife—Mary Magnet wouldn't. She'd too many notions for that. It takes a hard jolt to bring some off their high horse. (*Significantly.*)

MRS. RICKERT

[*Leaning forward confidentially.*]

Ain't it surprising now that she should 'a' gone so quick? A strong, lively girl like that—she did look the very picture of health. What did *you* understand was the cause of her sickness, Mrs. Shaefer? I heard say the doctors wasn't able to give any satisfaction whatever.

[*A sudden knock at the door intercepts the reply to this query.* MRS. RICKERT *rocks in silence, while* MRS. SHAEFER *opens the door and admits* NICK BLUNDY, *a tall, good-looking young workingman in a dark gray suit and flannel shirt. He carries a large pasteboard box under his arm, and enters nervously, quickly removing his soft felt hat.*]

MRS. SHAEFER

[*In a subdued voice and with great solemnity.*] Good evening, Mr. Blundy. You come to view the corpse?

[*She makes an impressive gesture toward the coffin and resumes her seat. The rocking and crocheting continue, while* NICK *stands for a moment or two by the coffin. The women glance furtively at him. When he moves* MRS. SHAEFER *speaks.*]

MRS. SHAEFER

Won't you set down a minute, Mr. Blundy?

[*She places a chair to the left of* MRS. RICKERT. NICK *seats himself gingerly on the edge of the chair, propping his package against it and turning his hat in his hand. The women assume attitudes and expressions of renewed*

gravity and importance. MRS. RICKERT *almost ceases to rock.*]

NICK

[*In a subdued, nervous voice.*]
It's a terrible thing about Mary, ain't it?
[*Appropriately lugubrious sighs and murmurs come from the women.*]

WOMEN

It is indeed, Mr. Blundy. Terrible. Yes, it's very sad.

NICK

[*After a slight pause.*]
Where's the old man?

MRS. SHAEFER

We're expectin' him in any minute.

NICK

They say he grieves very bitter.

MRS. SHAEFER

Yes, he takes on a good bit.

NICK

Ain't he goin' down to the hall tonight?

MRS. SHAEFER

[*With much gravity.*]

I can't say positive, Mr. Blundy. It's his *duty* to go. There's hopes he may be made to feel that.

NICK

[*Spasmodically, after another slight pause.*]

I didn't know there was anything ailed Mary. I seed her only a week or two ago walkin' down Grant Street one night, and she says to me: "Nick," she says, "it's slow times these days, ain't it, with the girls and the fellows; but," she says, "what'll you bet when we win this strike we don't have more coin in our pockets than ever we did—and then for the good old Saturday nights!" Why, she was laughin' and carryin' on as lively as a kitten.

MRS. RICKERT

[*Nodding.*]

She did enjoy a good time as much as any girl, Mary did.

NICK

[*Shaking his head mournfully.*]

She must 'a' been took awful sudden. I heard she died Wednesday night down in the St. Francis. Is that right?

MRS. SHAEFER

Yes, Mr. Blundy, them's the facts.

NICK

Have you heard say what it was that ailed her?

[MRS. RICKERT *stops rocking entirely and looks expectantly at* MRS. SHAEFER, *who draws herself up with portentous dignity.*]

MRS. SHAEFER

She was took very sudden, and they had need to operate to cure her. There's great danger in them operations.

[*A pause.* MRS. RICKERT *resumes rocking, folds her hands and looks wise.* NICK *gazes silently at the floor.*]

NICK

[*Sadly reflective.*]

She sure did have the ginger in her, that girl. There was few fellows could do with a loom what she could.

MRS. RICKERT

Mary was smart all right. I guess there ain't nobody questions that.

NICK

[*Lost in his own recollections.*]

Why, I seed her one day on a bet run six looms, at onct—seventy picks to the inch, mind you—and not a snarl on one o' them six machines. While we was standin' there watchin' the boss come by, and he says: "Mary Magnet," he says, "ef I could get the rest o' these chaps to work the way you kin work," he says, "I'd git a damn big raise to me wages," he says; and quick as a flash Mary says back: "Well, just because me and the boys *kin* make human shuttlecocks out o' ourselves, that ain't no reason why we're a goin' to *do* it," she says, "just to raise *your* pay. We know darn well we'd never raise our own," she says, all the time jumpin' around from one loom to another as springy as a cricket. (*A pause.*) Gee! (*He shakes his head.*) It sure is hard to believe she'd 'a' been took like this so soon.

[*He fumbles after the box on the floor and lifts it to his knees, hesitates awkwardly and then removes the cover, displaying a white pillow of immortelles with the word "Asleep" formed upon it in large purple letters and tied across*

one corner with an elaborate bow of purple satin ribbon. There is a chorus of appreciative murmurs from the women. MRS. SHAEFER *rises and takes the box, holding it up to full view.*]

MRS. SHAEFER

Now, ain't that a beautiful thing?

MRS. RICKERT

Oh, that is *handsome.*

MRS. SHAEFER

Wait till I fix it on the coffin.

[*She walks across the room and props the pillow (which has a fixture for this purpose) on the lower half of the coffin which is closed, then backs away admiringly to get the effect. The others rise for the same purpose. At this moment the sound of shouts and band music, faintly audible outside in the distance for some few moments previous, becomes more distinct.* MRS. SHAEFER *lifts her hand.*]

MRS. SHAEFER

It's Ferguson.

MRS. RICKERT

Yes, that's who it is. They're bringin' him up from the depot.

MRS. SHAEFER

Most like there'll be trouble with the police down here by the mill at the corner.

[*A sudden loud knock comes. All walk toward the door, and* MRS. SHAEFER *opens it, admitting* TIMOTHY MCGRATH, *a stocky, sandy-haired, smooth-shaven man in a black suit with a striker's button and ribbon conspicuous in his buttonhole. At the sound of the knock* MRS. LITTIG *creeps timidly in from the kitchen and stands in the background with one hand on the coffin.*]

MCGRATH

[*Standing in the doorway.*]
Where's Magnet?

MRS. SHAEFER

He ain't come in yet.

MRS. RICKERT

Wasn't he at the depot?

MCGRATH

[*Rapidly and excitedly.*]

No, he was not, and Ferguson's been raisin' hell down there. "Where's Magnet?" he says the first thing he steps off the train. "Take away the band, take away the parade, take away that carriage," he says, "and get me Magnet. Why ain't Magnet here?" he says. "I told you to have Magnet here." Jack Flaven spoke up and says: "Mr. Ferguson, we done our best but we can't locate Magnet. You may not 'a' heard," he says, "but Magnet's had trouble. His girl's dead. He won't talk tonight," and Ferguson says: (*He lowers his voice.*) "I don't give a damn who's dead; I'll have no words with anybody till I've seen Magnet," he says. Can't none of you tell me where he is? When was he last home?

MRS. SHAEFER

I understand he ain't been home since noon, Mr. McGrath.

MCGRATH

Well, for Christ's sake, any time he gets in send him down to the hall.

[NICK BLUNDY *and* MCGRATH *go out.* MRS. SHAEFER *and* MRS. RICKERT *remain standing just inside the open door.* MRS. LITTIG *moves aimlessly back and forth behind the*

coffin, her arms folded, gazing at the dead and now and then wiping her eyes. The band is now distinctly heard at the end of the street playing the "Marseillaise," and cheers, "Hurrah for Ferguson!" mingled with shouts.]

MRS. RICKERT

[*Pointing excitedly.*]

There's Ferguson! See him there walkin' behind the band! Oh, he's a grand man! There ain't nothin' this town can do that's too good for Ferguson—that's what my Jim says.

[*They stand for a moment looking and listening, then close the outside door.* MRS. LITTIG *furtively leaves her stand by the coffin and starts toward the dining room door, but is intercepted by* MRS. RICKERT, *who crosses the stage and seats herself near* MRS. SHAEFER, *who has resumed her crocheting.*]

MRS. RICKERT

Mis' Littig, you was at the hospital when Mary died, wasn't you? I heard tell she suffered a good bit.

MRS. LITTIG

[*Turning reluctantly on her way to the door.*]

She died very quiet, Mary did.

MRS. RICKERT

[*Persistently.*]

Ain't you heard the doctors say what was the matter with her?

MRS. LITTIG

No, I ain't heard.

MRS. RICKERT

Ain't they told her father?

MRS. LITTIG

I ain't heard him say.

MRS. RICKERT

I heard tell Mary was to be married in the summer, Mrs. Littig. Is that a fact?

MRS. LITTIG

I ain't never heard Mary was to be married.

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Addressing* MRS. RICKERT *in a contemptuous whisper.*]

She don't know nothin'.

[*Exit* MRS. LITTIG *by the dining room door.* MRS. RICKERT *looks around to make sure that*

she has gone, then draws her chair close to MRS. SHAEFER *and whispers a question. The latter responds by a very slow and preternaturally solemn nodding of the head, accompanied by a sideward glance full of the direst meaning.*]

MRS. RICKERT

Oh, ain't that terrible now! (*Parenthetically.*) I had my suspicions! (*She leans forward eagerly and whispers another question.*)

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Very impressively.*]

That I don't know, Mrs. Rickert. As far as I can make out there ain't *nobody* knows. "You can be sure o' one thing," Joe says to me this morning: "whoever it is, *Magnet has still to learn his name.* It's a short lease o' life for the man that wronged Mary Magnet, once her father finds out the truth. That's what ails Magnet," Joe says to me. "*He can't find out.* Ef somethin' don't happen to take his mind off it he'll brood hisself crazy."

MRS. RICKERT

[*Shaking her head and clicking her tongue.*]

Tck! Tck! tck! It certainly is awful. Now whoever do you suppose?

MRS. SHAEFER

In *my* belief it's some rich fellow she met up to the city. Many a Saturday night when work was over she's been seen take the train. I understand she spread round the report she was goin' to business college up there. I guess, if truth be told, it was the gay life she was after.—Well, she's not the first girl foolishness has brought to her grave. (*She nods wisely.*) Them rich ones knows how to cover their tracks.

MRS. RICKERT

Ain't it a terrible shame now for a man like Magnet, a man as has worked hard and lived an honest life and everybody respects, that his girl should make a common woman of herself and his name be made a shame in the town?

MRS. SHAEFER

There's very few knows the real truth, Mrs. Rickert. "Whatever you do, Mamie," Joe says to me, "*don't talk.* It would be a bad thing just at this time," he says, "if many was to get the straight of how Magnet's girl come to her death. I wouldn't want Ferguson to know of it," he says; "why, Ferguson thinks the sun rises and sets in old Magnet," he says.

MRS. RICKERT

Mary always did seem like a right well behaved, sensible girl, too—for all her free ways and smart talk. It's queer about them things.

MRS. SHAEFER

She looked too high, Mrs. Rickert—she looked too high. That's the way with them smart, good-lookin' girls. They ain't never content with enough. That's what I says to Joe this mornin'. "Now there was a girl," I says, "that wanted to own the earth." Why, I used to see her go down to work in the mornin' her head way up in the air, swingin' her arms and steppin' along as proud as a peacock. You might 'a' thought she was some fine lady instead of a mill girl. An' now look what she's come to. A bitter dose she's had to take for her pride.

[*There is a sound of voices and footsteps on the porch outside. The women rise. The door opens and* WILLIAM MAGNET *enters. He is a tall, spare man of over fifty, with plentiful gray hair, dressed in a dark suit and flannel shirt. He is pale and harassed-looking, and almost savagely grim and abrupt in manner. He holds open the door, admitting* TIMOTHY MCGRATH.]

MAGNET

[*Abruptly, closing the door.*]

Take a seat, Tim. I'll be with you in a minute. (*To* MRS. SHAEFER, *politely but sternly.*) What is there I can do for *you*, Mrs. Shaefer?

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Ingratiatingly.*]

Put it the other way round, Mr. Magnet. Ain't there nothin' we can do for *you?* That's what we're here for. Won't you come out in the kitchen and have a bite of somethin' before you talk to Mr. McGrath? It'll do you a sight o' good, Mr. Magnet. There's coffee right on the stove.

MAGNET

[*Maintaining his direct and forbidding manner.*]

Thank you very kindly, but I ain't hungry just at present. There's one thing you *can* do, if you'll excuse my speaking very plain, Mrs. Shaefer.

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Somewhat awed.*]

Well, now, what's that, Mr. Magnet?

MAGNET

You can leave me to myself for this evening if you'll be so kind. I'm willing those that wants to should come in during the daytime, but at nights it suits me better to be alone.

MRS. SHAEFER

[*Swelling with offended dignity.*]

Why, certainly, Mr. Magnet, just as you say. I've no wish to thrust in my company anywhere I ain't wanted.

[*She goes out promptly by the dining room door, followed by* MRS. RICKERT. MAGNET, *quite unmoved, draws up a chair and seats himself in front of* MCGRATH. *He speaks restlessly, and with a harsh, detached manner.*]

MAGNET

Now, Tim, whatever you've got to say, make it as short as you can. This is no time and place to waste words. (*He motions vaguely toward the coffin.*) That ought to be plain.

MCGRATH

[*Leaning forward and placing his hand on* MAGNET'S *knee.*]

You have us all wrong, Magnet, if you think you

ain't got our sympathy. You've *got* it. But, man alive—(*Straightening slightly and shaking both hands in front of him.*)—we can't stop tonight to think of our feelings. We gotta think of the proposition we're up against. Inside of an hour that hall down there'll be chock full o' workers from the Tabitha. We've sweat blood to get 'em there. If they go back to work tomorrow morning this strike's on the blink. Who's goin' to hold that crowd, Magnet? Ferguson can't do it. He don't know the language.

MAGNET

[*Impatiently.*]

What's the matter with Bruno Bastido? He can make a speech all right.

MCGRATH

They're jealous of Bastido. They think he's got a graft. Magnet, do you remember what you says to us down at the hotel that night last January when Ferguson first come to town? You says: "Boys, it ain't no use tryin' to stir up the warpers an' the twisters an' the loom workers—they're organized so tight already they can hardly move. If you want to see a real strike in this town, there's just one way to do it, and that is *stop the looms.* Begin at the bottom of the ladder and get the dyers and the weavers out. Stop wastin' your breath on these gen-

tlemen of labor that's enjoyin' good union wages, and talk to them poor devils that's starved so long they don't know they're hungry. Get out them at the bottom and the others 'll follow fast enough."— Wasn't that the advice you give, Magnet?

MAGNET

[*Indifferently.*]

I guess it was, Tim.

MCGRATH

Ain't we stuck pretty close to them tactics you proposed? Ain't that the way the Maxwell was shut down, an' the Junta? Wasn't you personally pretty much responsible for bringin' about them two walk outs?

MAGNET

[*Wearily.*]

Well, suppose I was, Tim. What's that to do with it?

MCGRATH

[*With renewed earnestness.*]

Why, just this, Magnet. You *got* the men out, but there's some of the rest of us has had the devil's own time tryin' to *keep* 'em out. You know what the trouble is. Up to the middle o' last week we ain't never been able to get as much as a look-in on the Tabitha. That G—— d—— Vito Toccati they've got

for a foreman up there has double-crossed us from the start. It's pretty hard on them poor devils from the Maxwell and the Junta that's livin' along from day to day on bread and potatoes from the relief station to see the Tabitha hands goin' to work an' know they're gettin' double pay and the promise of a big raise when the strike's over. They won't stick it out that way much longer. You can't put *too* big a strain on human nature. We've got to shut down the Tabitha. Why, Magnet, you was the first to say it. For two weeks we've kept a hundred pickets round that mill. It's been a grim game. Every day there's been as many as thirty out of the hundred arrested or sent to the hospital with a shot through the arm or a broken head, and every time the next morning we've had thirty new ones there to take their places. Well, we've made some progress. Out of the 425 that works in that mill there was only one hundred got through the picket lines this mornin'. But, my God, the fight's only just begun! We gotta get 'em *all* out an we gotta *keep* 'em out. We gotta clinch this thing, and tonight's the time. Ferguson's come down a' purpose. If this meeting falls flat the whole strike may go for nothing. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you, Magnet? Don't you feel like you ought to come down and help us put it through?

[*A pause.* MAGNET *rises abruptly and faces* MCGRATH *squarely.*]

MAGNET

Well, now, Tim, if you've said your say and feel satisfied, you can have my answer. It's the same I give you before we come in a few minutes ago. I can't do what you want me to. (*Hastily, as* McGrath *starts to interrupt.*) At least, I *won't* do it. There's no more chance of my goin' down to Murray Hall tonight than there would be if it was me instead of my girl lyin' in that coffin. Now that's all I have to say. I hope it's enough. I wish you'd go now and leave me to myself.

MCGRATH

Do you mean that, Magnet?

MAGNET

[*Savagely.*]

Do I *mean* it? O' course I mean it. Did you ever know me say anything I didn't mean? (*He turns his back.*)

MCGRATH

[*Rising.*]

Do you think you're doin' the square thing by Ferguson, Magnet? He's staked pretty heavy on you.

MAGNET

[*Desperately.*]

Square or crooked, Tim, have it as you please. I ain't goin' down to Murray Hall tonight. And what's more, I ain't goin' to argue about it any further. Now I wish you'd go.

MCGRATH

[*Shaking his head.*]

I'm sorry about this, Magnet. I don't think you're doin' the thing that will give you the most satisfaction in the end.

[McGrath *goes out.* Magnet *closes the door and stands for a moment stretching his arms back and forth with a weary movement of mental suffering and physical exhaustion. He walks to the coffin for a moment, shakes his head, moans a little and swears under his breath, then sinks into a rocking chair near the table, stretches out his feet, throws back his head, closes his eyes and lets his hands rest limply one above the other in an attitude of utter weariness and dejection.* Mrs. Littig *looks in from the dining room, retreats for a moment, and then reappears, carrying a pair of shoes, which she places on the floor beside him. He stirs a little, but otherwise*

pays no attention. MRS. LITTIG *returns to the kitchen and brings back a large bottle, cup and spoon. She pours from the bottle into the cup and touches* MAGNET *on the arm.*]

MRS. LITTIG

Take a sup o' this.

MAGNET

[*Rousing.*]
What is it?

MRS. LITTIG

It's hot spirits and Jamaicy ginger.

MAGNET

[*Motioning her away impatiently.*]
No, no. I don't want it.

[MRS. LITTIG *places the cup on the table near him and starts toward the door.*]

MAGNET

[*Moving uneasily.*]
Mis' Littig!

[MRS. LITTIG *turns and walks slowly back.*]

MAGNET

, Mis' Littig. Come set here a minute. I want to ask you somethin'.

[MRS. LITTIG *seats herself in a nearby chair and rocks timidly with folded arms.* MAGNET, *with eyes still closed, twists about in great distress.*]

What did you say was the last thing Mary said to you?

MRS. LITTIG

She says: "Tell pap it's all right. Tell him he ain't to worry."

MAGNET

Didn't she never leave a message for anybody else?

MRS. LITTIG

Not as I heard.

MAGNET

That night you was settin' by her when her fever was so high— Ain't she never mentioned anybody's name?

MRS. LITTIG

[*Shaking her head.*]

No, she ain't.

MAGNET

Didn't you ever hear the nurse or the doctor say there was somebody she was talkin' about?

MRS. LITTIG

No, I didn't hear.

MAGNET

[*Reaching shakily over to the table for the cup and taking a long drink, then replacing the cup on the table and slowly beginning to unlace his boots and put on dry ones.*]

What ever become o' that ring Mary used to wear?

MRS. LITTIG

What ring?

MAGNET

Why, that gold ring with a little blue stone in it. You've seed her wear it. She told me she bought it out of her savings. It ain't on her finger now. What become of it?

MRS. LITTIG

I dunno, Mr. Magnet. I never noticed what she done with it.

MAGNET

I was upstairs this mornin' lookin' through all her things, and I couldn't find it. It ain't on her finger

now. (*A pause.*) Them times last winter, Mrs. Littig, when Mary went up to the city so often, didn't she ever tell you nothing about where she went and what she done?

MRS. LITTIG

[*Reflectively.*]

She wasn't ever much to tell.

MAGNET

Can't you recall she ever mentioned anybody she met up there, anybody that took her round and acted nice to her?

MRS. LITTIG

[*Mildly.*]

Don't seem like I can remember she ever did.

[*A pause.* MRS. LITTIG *rises, takes the bottle and cup from the table and moves toward the kitchen. She turns as she reaches the dining room door.*]

Mebbe you would eat a little after a while. I got some supper in the stove. (*She goes out.*)

MAGNET

[*Groaning despairingly and turning in his chair.*]

Her mother would 'a' knew! Her mother would 'a' knew!

[*There is a knock.* MAGNET *does not move.*] Somebody else after me, damn it! Why can't they leave me alone? (*The knock is repeated.* MAGNET *rises and goes savagely toward the door.*) I'll teach 'em to stay out o' here for one night!

[*He opens and admits* JOHN FERGUSON—*a large man, tall, heavily built, smooth-shaven. He enters in silence.* MAGNET *succumbs a little under his steady eye.*]

Oh, why, good evening, Mr. Ferguson, good evening.

[*He holds out his hand, which* FERGUSON *takes silently.*]

FERGUSON

I'm sorry to find you in trouble, Magnet.

MAGNET

[*Walking toward the opposite side of the room. For the first time he speaks a little tremulously.*]

Yes, I'm in a bad way, Mr. Ferguson, a bad way. It's my girl, Mary. (*He motions toward the coffin.*) She's all I had.

[*While* MAGNET'S *back is turned,* FERGUSON *glances swiftly about the room and in the direction of the open coffin with a look that is peculiarly painful, apprehensive and signifi-*

cant. Then he walks toward MAGNET *and puts a hand on his shoulder.*]

FERGUSON

I know you've had a hard blow, Magnet, but there's only one way to meet it. Pull yourself together. You have work to do. You're lucky there. Not every man has that comfort in his trouble.

MAGNET

[*Half turning away.*]

It don't seem like I can take any comfort from that, Mr. Ferguson. I'd be glad to if I could. I wish I *could* talk to the boys tonight. I can't do it. I can't do nothing for a while but set here an' think. I can't believe Mary's gone. I can't get used to it. She was all I had. I'd better be dead myself. (*Passionately.*) My God, I wish I was!

FERGUSON

[*Very quiet and repressed.*]

That's no thought for you to hold tonight, Magnet. If a man's no good to the world and he knows it, let him get out of it if he wants to. It don't stand that way with you. You've got a big responsibility. Why don't you be worthy of it? Why don't you stand up to it?

MAGNET

I can't think about that now, Mr. Ferguson. The way I see it I've got a right to be left alone with my own trouble. It's a privilege belongs to any man if he's a mind to claim it.

FERGUSON

[*With sudden intensity.*]

Let me tell you, Magnet, it's a privilege no man ought to want to claim at the expense of fourteen thousand of his fellow workers. Things have got to a crisis, and you've had as much to do with that as anybody. If we can close out the Tabitha tomorrow and hold down it and the other mills till the end of next week, we're over the danger line. If we can't, we lose as sure as fate. If we lose, it'll take years, years—you know that, Magnet—to win back what we've gained. The outcome o' this strike don't rest on High, Magnet—(*he makes a sardonic upward gesture*)—it rests right here in this room with you and me. (*He pounds his fist softly on the table.*) Now what are you going to do about it?

[MAGNET *shakes his head doubtfully.* FERGUSON *continues.*]

You want to remember how much depends on a big fight like this. What made the workers of this town listen to me when I landed here? It was because

they knew I'd won a miners' strike out in Montana and a lumber jacks' strike in Oregon and a cotton workers' strike in North Carolina and a glass blowers' strike in New Jersey. They thought if I'd helped others to better wages and shorter hours I could help them. If we lose here, the next town where I go they won't be quite so ready to listen, now will they? To every big strike lost there's a hundred others lost in future. I've been holding off from this town a long time. I thought they weren't ripe for it. I looked over the ground a good while before I made up my mind. Do you want to know what was the chief thing made me decide to come here this winter and stick it out? It was because I found you here. When I heard you talk to that crowd outside the Excelsior one night last year, I said to myself: "When the time comes, there's a man I can depend on." Well, I have depended on you. You don't want to give me cause to regret that, do you, Magnet? If it hadn't been for you things here could never have come to a head the way they have. You know that. It's no time for you to desert me now. You can't do more to prove your sorrow than to meet it the way a man ought. Come on down to the hall, Magnet. The boys are waiting.

MAGNET

[*Painfully, after a pause.*]

I'm sorry. I can't do it, Ferguson.

FERGUSON

Why can't you do it?

MAGNET

[*Moving away a little distance and speaking with great feeling.*]

You're a big man, Ferguson. You've got a big mind. You've got a big power. You know how to fight, and you know how to put fight into other men. You put it into me. I shan't ever forget the day you come into this God-forsaken town. It give me a feeling I ain't had for a good many years—a feeling I'd clean forgot I ever could have. Well—I followed it. I've fought for you, Ferguson, every day and every night for these past two months, and I'd 'a' fought for you to the end for better or for worse if it hadn't been for this. There's something, Ferguson, a man's mind don't seem to have no power to make him understand. He's got to 'a' been there himself. You ain't got no children of your own, Ferguson. You can't understand there's some troubles comes first with a man. The whole world might be waiting for him to save it, but it'd have to wait. Nobody wouldn't have any right to interfere. You don't know what it is to a man, Ferguson, when somebody —when somebody—

[MAGNET'S *voice breaks. He pauses and looks about hopelessly as if driven into a corner.*

Then, with a sudden, desperate gesture, he breaks out fiercely.]

Damn it, there's some rotten coward, some beast, some low down scoundrel has ruined my girl. I don't know who he is. But I want to know! I want to find out! I want to find him! I want to kill him! It's the only thing I do want. Until I've done that, this strike can go to hell. You can go to hell. They all can go to hell.

[*He drops into a chair and covers his face with his hands.* FERGUSON *watches him steadily in silence, then as he quiets a little begins to pace up and down.*]

FERGUSON

This man you say has done your girl so much harm—how do you know but what she loved him?

MAGNET

[*In a savage tone, looking up swiftly.*]

Loved him! Loved him! The damn dog. Suppose she *did* love him! What's that to do with it?

FERGUSON

[*Very quietly, still pacing up and down and looking at the floor.*]

A whole lot. No man ever lived that ruined the woman that loved him. It can't be done.

[*There is such a deep conviction in* FERGUSON'S *tone that* MAGNET *gazes at him in silent astonishment.* FERGUSON *seats himself slowly, remaining silent a minute.*]

There's something I might as well tell you, Magnet, if you have a mind to listen.

[*A long pause follows,* FERGUSON *gazing at the floor. Then he speaks in a low voice.*]

You are not the only man in this town tonight whose hopes are lying in a coffin.

MAGNET

[*Startled, looking closely at* FERGUSON.]
You? (FERGUSON *nods.*) Somebody close?

FERGUSON

Yes, somebody close.

MAGNET

Dead?

FERGUSON

[*Heavily.*]
Yes, dead.

MAGNET

[*After a pause, drawing closer.*)
It ain't your wife?

FERGUSON

No, not my wife. (*He moves restlessly, and speaks, after a pause, in a changed tone.*) It's been some time since your girl's mother died, Magnet—isn't that so?

MAGNET

Fifteen years.

FERGUSON

I suppose you and she lived happy together, didn't you?

MAGNET

[*Solemnly.*]
We did that.

FERGUSON

Well—I wasn't so lucky. My wife and I haven't lived together at all this many a day. If we had I'd never be here in a loom worker's cottage, fighting within an inch of my life to win a strike. I'd be sitting in some hotel parlor hobnobbing with a lot of bishops and politicians and college professors, trying to patch up a peace between the mill owners and the strikers. I'd wear a medal and have a good fat bank account. I'd kowtow to ladies and gentlemen. They wouldn't hate me the way they do now—they'd only snub me. I wouldn't stick out my tongue at the minister. When I drank champagne and ate at swell restaurants I'd do it on the quiet. The newspapers

wouldn't hound me—they'd praise me. I wouldn't be a scoundrel, an anarchist, a cut-throat revolutionist. I'd be a respectable labor leader—that's what I'd be if I'd stayed with my wife. Maybe you think I'd better have stayed with her. (*He laughs sneeringly.*) There's plenty would agree with you in that opinion.

[MAGNET *makes a protesting gesture, but* FERGUSON *pays no attention.*]

Well, I didn't stay with her, I left her. A good living is all she gets out of me. It's all she ever will get. Except my name. She hangs on to that. And my freedom. She's got that locked up safe enough, or she thinks she has. She claims I'm not good enough to marry any other woman. (*He laughs cynically.*) Maybe she's right about that. But I was good enough for another woman to love me just the same. (*With a touch of boyish pride.*)

She did love me anyhow, this other woman, whether I was good enough or not. She didn't get a living out of me. She didn't get my name. She didn't get a right to blame me if I was unfaithful to her—and I wasn't always faithful to her. She didn't even get a right to tell anybody she loved me, and it seems like that's what a woman hankers after the most of all. I never told her I loved her. She just had a sort of an idea I was glad she loved me. I *was* glad—for a kind of a queer reason. She kept me from

feeling lonely. I'll say that for her—she was the only human being I've ever known that could stand between me and mortal loneliness. Maybe that means I loved her. I don't know. I don't suppose I did. (*A pause.*)

Well, tonight, just before I took the train to come down here, I heard that woman was dead. I didn't enjoy the trip down so very much.

[*There is so much suppressed suffering in his voice that* MAGNET *instinctively reaches forward and lays a hand on his shoulder.* FERGUSON *shakes it off, rises and faces* MAGNET.]

You said to me I don't know how it feels to be a father. You're right about that, Magnet, dead right. I don't know. Being the kind of man I am, nobody seems to think I'm entitled to any connection with a family. A courtroom or a jail cell is supposed to be the place where my disposition thrives to the best advantage. The only kind of a father I've ever had a chance to be you wouldn't call a father at all. You'd call him a beast, a low-down scoundrel, a man that ruins other men's daughters. Since my mother died, when I was a ten-year-old kid working on the bunkers in a coal mine out in Colorado, I've never known but one home, and that's in a dead woman's heart. I'm alone now and likely to stay so. I haven't any more hope of happiness in

this world than I have of going to heaven when I die, and that's none at all.

[*With sudden, passionate emphasis.*]

But there's one thing I don't ever forget, Magnet —unhappiness is a lot easier to bear when you've got clothes to cover your back and food enough to hold your body and soul together. When I come to a town in the dead of winter and find twenty-five thousand people on the edge of freezing and starvation, I remember the time when my own mother went cold and hungry, and it don't seem to make very much difference to me whether I'm happy or not.

[*He takes up his hat as if to leave, and moves a little toward the door.*]

As long as I can keep alive to fight for those poor devils, I'll fight for 'em. There was a while I expected others to feel the same way, but I've got over that. Nobody knows any better than I do how few men you're likely to run across in a lifetime that'll join the ranks to stay. I used to take it pretty hard when an old comrade fell out, but it don't make so much difference any more. I've swallowed that kind of a disappointment with my daily bread for so many years now that it's got to be a pretty old story. There's one thing that always helps me to stand it. If there's nobody else in this world I can count on, I know I can always count on myself. As long as there's breath in my body I'll never lose heart and I'll

never give up the game. A good part of the world seems to look on me as a kind of a devil. Well, if that's the way they feel about it, let 'em think so. I don't mind being the kind of an individual that can walk through hell without being scorched any so's you'd notice it. Life can kill and bury my happiness, but it can't kill and bury my courage. This strike that's on in this town is the biggest I've ever handled. Without you to help me, Magnet, maybe I'll lose it. Or maybe I won't lose it. Maybe I'll win it anyhow. This night may mean the beginning of the end for me or it may mean the beginning of the biggest success I've ever known. But whichever way it is, you can be sure of one thing—if ever I go down it'll be with every man's hand against me and my back shoved up against a hard high wall.

[*There is a knock.* FERGUSON *opens the door and* MCGRATH *steps just inside.*]

MCGRATH

Are you ready, Mr. Ferguson? Time's getting short.

FERGUSON

All ready, McGrath.

MAGNET

[*Rising suddenly.*]

Hold on there a minute, Tim. (*He walks to the*

dining room door and calls to MRS. LITTIG.) You needn't set the table till I get back, Mrs. Littig. I'm going down to the hall. (*He takes his hat and walks to the door.*)

FERGUSON

You take the machine and go on over, boys. I want to walk. I'll be with you in a few minutes.

[MAGNET *and* MCGRATH *go out.* FERGUSON *closes the door and leans against it, raising his head and laying one hand across his mouth. As he stands there* MRS. LITTIG *enters hesitatingly, looking about to make sure* MAGNET *has gone. She walks over to* FERGUSON, *and standing before him, pulls from the neck of her dress a long ribbon and from it unties a gold ring which she hands to* FERGUSON. *She looks at him sadly and timidly but simply and quite without reproach.*]

MRS. LITTIG

She said I was to give you this. She said I was to say she died happy.

[*Without waiting for comment or reply,* MRS. LITTIG *leaves the room by the dining room door.* FERGUSON *slips the ring in his vest pocket and walks slowly to the coffin. He stands behind it and looks down.*]

CURTAIN

II

THE BLUE SPHERE

Characters

Joseph Delavan, *a grocer.*
Mrs. Delavan.
Harry, *their son.*
Eddie, *the monstrosity.*
The Shadow.
The Fast Mail.
Mrs. Minturn, *a neighbor.*
John Galloway, *an engineer.*
Petersen, *a fireman.*

Conductor, Postmen, Trainmen and Passengers.

THE BLUE SPHERE

SCENE

The kitchen of the Delavan home, one block from the tracks at the outskirts of Marydale. A solid board fence, unpainted, encloses the yard on three sides. In the front, a yellow picket fence with a gate caught by a string. From the gate to the front and rear doors, a moist, brick walk. Outside the kitchen window, vines and hollyhocks. Inside, a breakfast table on which dishes are spread, and at opposite sides of which sit MR. *and* MRS. DELAVAN.

TIME—*Seven-thirty A. M.*

JOSEPH DELAVAN

[*A short, stout man with brown hair and moustache, and brown-blue eyes, a grocery man by trade—rising and brushing the crumbs from his lap.*]

Well, I'll be going. (*He takes down his coat and hat from a hook, and folds up his paper.*) See that the boy don't get out again today, will you?

[*He glances toward the front room in an ap-*

prehensive, strained way, and goes out, leaving the door open, but carefully fastening the gate behind him.]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*A blonde woman of thirty-three, clearing away the breakfast dishes and shaking her head dolefully.*]

Ah me! Oh, the day that he was born! It makes all the difference. Things have not been the same since he came—poor little thing that it is! And to think that I should have given birth to it! (*She brushes away the gathering tears with her hand.*) It would be a blessing almost—(*she pauses, terrified by her own thoughts*)—but God forgive me for thinkin' of it! It would be me that would suffer if any harm came to a single hair of its head. (*She wipes her eyes anew.*)

DELAVAN

[*Walking out Wood Street to his store, and sighing heavily.*]

Dear, dear, dear, dear! That this should have befallen us! (*He sighs again.*) Three years old! Not walking, not talking, and never will! The years! The years! (*He renews his sigh.*)

THE SHADOW

[*A soft, girlish figure, entering the Delavan kitchen, trailing clouds of diaphanous drapery, a pale blue sphere in her hands. She looks about, passes through the walls to the front bedroom, where Eddie,* THE MONSTROSITY, *lies, and bends over the crib.*]

Eddie! Eddie! (*She holds up the sphere.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Ellsworth, one hundred and sixty miles away.*]

Oooooooo-ee! Ooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Laying dishes in the dishpan.*]

My, but the flowers smell sweet this morning. (*She pauses to examine the trumpet flowers.*)

THE MONSTROSITY

[*A child, with a head almost twice the size of a normal one, opening its large and unnaturally starey eyes, and for the first time perceiving the blue sphere.*]

Urg-ubbla-da! Blub! Blub! (*It holds out its hands.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Smiling winsomely, and waving the sphere to and fro, and revealing the splendor of its clarity.*]

See how beautiful it is! How blue, how light!

[*It seems to float in her hands like a bubble as she turns it round and round, beckoning the child to follow.*]

THE MONSTROSITY

[*Its arms still aloft, kicking and crowing horribly.*]

Ahda-da! Urg! Ahbublu!

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Hearing the sound of its voice, and opening the door.*]

It's awake, is it? My little pet. (*She suppresses an almost uncontrollable shudder as she views it.*) I thought I heard you kicking and crowing. Poor little dear! My loving, petty lamb! Come now! (*She lifts it up and fondles it on her breast and neck.*) Oh, the poor little sweetheart. Was it having to talk all to itself? Well, mother's been thinking of her pretty baby all the night long. (*To the lad of nine years who appears in the doorway*): Come, Harry. Get your clothes on. I'll want you to

go to the store. (*She smooths the great head on her breast with a feeling of anguish.*) Sweety baby! Mother's little lamb. (*She begins to dress it.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Ultona, one hundred and fifty miles away.*]

Oooooo-ee! Oooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

DELAVAN

[*Arriving at his store, still thinking.*]

It would be so much better if it should die—though I don't suppose I ought to wish it. It's unchristian. (*He unlocks the door and goes in.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Before the child and its mother, waving the blue ball.*]

See! How wonderful! How lovely! Here are yellow and grey and green as I turn it. See the pink here—isn't it lovely? This soft, soft shade of pink! (*She holds the ball close.*)

THE MONSTROSITY

[*Staring, interested, allured.*]

Ah-da! Eee! Oo-blub!

[*It holds out its hands and kicks and struggles.*

The shadow moves backward, then forward, then backward, then forward, luring the child by the motion.]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Carrying the child to the kitchen.*]

Come now, I'll put you down here where mother can see you. That's right. Now here's a nice wooden rattle for baby to play with until mother gets it something to eat. (*She places a red and green rattle in the child's lap. He drops it to gaze at the blue sphere.*) And now here is something for the baby to eat. (*She brings a bowl with a spoon, from which she feeds it, sighing the while. The shadow disappears.*)

MRS. MINTURN

[*A neighbor, looking out of her window at some sweet pea vines and smiling.*]

What a perfect day! How nice Mrs. Arthur's trees look! I think— (*She is thinking of calling on Mrs. Arthur.*)

THE SHADOW

[*At her elbow.*]

You think you will call on Mrs. Delavan, don't you? She is so lonely!

MRS. MINTURN

[*Sympathetically but seemingly continuing her own thoughts.*]

I will call on Mrs. Delavan; she is so lonely. I guess I'd better do my house work first, though.

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Ceasing to feed the child.*]

Now then, will it play with its rattle like a nicey baby, while mama does the front room? (*She passes her hand over her forehead wearily, and turns to her work.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Reappearing to the child.*]

See how wonderful! How beautiful! It floats and flies as you will float and fly if you come with me. (*She dances the sphere before it.*)

THE MONSTROSITY

Ugh! Blooble!

[*It begins to propel itself across the floor toward the door, holding out its hands at times.*]

THE SHADOW

[*Waving the blue sphere.*]

Come! Come!

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Ungers, one hundred and twenty miles away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Ooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

MRS. MINTURN

[*Finishing her housework at eleven.*]

Now I think I'll go. Mrs. Delavan's life with that child on her hands must be awful. (*She throws a light shawl about her shoulders and steps out.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Meeting her at the* DELAVAN *gate.*]

Forget the gate! Forget the gate!

[*Unconsciously* MRS. MINTURN *leaves the gate open.*]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*The spell of self-absorption broken by the sight of* MRS. MINTURN *nearing her window.*]

Eddie! Eddie! Where *is* he? (*She hurries to the kitchen and out upon the walk, where she finds him.*)

(*To* MRS. MINTURN, *without greeting*): He always makes for the gate for some reason, and we're so afraid that if he gets out some time he'll get hurt. (*She picks him up and carries him back to the kitchen entrance with grieved thoughts.*) Now won't you play here, dearie? (*She puts him down.*)

MRS. MINTURN

[*A pale, slight woman with partially gray hair.*]

It is such a lovely morning I thought I would run over and see how you are getting along. (*To herself*): What an affliction! Horrible! What a dreadful thing it really is. (*She plunges into an exchange of friendly gossip.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Reappearing before the child, the blue sphere in her hands.*]

See! How perfect! Green and violet, and this fleck of milky white all toned into one! (*She waves the blue sphere.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Berham, eighty miles away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Oooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

JOHN GALLOWAY

[*The engineer, stout and round, to* PETERSEN, *the fireman, slender and sinewy.*]

This makes the fifteenth year I've been on this run; fifteen years tomorrow. If somethin' don't happen then it'll be fifteen years without a real, serious, big accident. I guess I'd better tap on wood.

[*He smites the small window ledge of his window. The engine takes a great trestle.*]

PETERSEN

[*Stopping in his shoveling.*]

This makes my fifth.

[*The thunder of the wheels on the bridge drowns most of the sound, and the wind blows the rest away.*]

DELAVAN

[*Approaching his home at twelve-fifteen, a block distant.*]

Well, if the gate isn't open and Eddie on the sidewalk! Ella ought to keep a better lookout than that. I told her about it this morning! (*He hurries forward.*) It's bad enough to have a child in this state, but to have it crawling all over the neighborhood. (*He stoops to pick it up.*)

THE SHADOW

[*The blue sphere in her hands.*]

Forget the gate! Forget the gate! (*Passing her hand before his eyes.*)

[*He enters the gate, leaving it open, but returns after a little to close it.*]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Appearing at the door, distressed and ashamed.*]

Eddie! He has crawled out again! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Whatever will I do with him! Why, he was right here only a moment ago. Where did you find him? (*She makes room for* MRS. MINTURN, who *comes forward to make her departure.*)

DELAVAN

[*With suppressed irritation.*]

Outside the gate. He was half way down the street here. The gate was wide open.

MRS. MINTURN

[*Apologetically, sorry for* MRS. DELAVAN.]

I may have left it open, though I thought I closed it. I must be going now. I'm sorry. I know how it is with children. They love to crawl. (*She greets* MR. DELAVAN.)

DELAVAN

[*To* MRS. DELAVAN, *after* MRS. MINTURN *has gone.*]

Something is sure to happen one of these days if you don't keep that gate closed. It's bad enough as it is, seems to me, without making a spectacle of us. I—

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Wiping her eyes.*]

There you go. As though I didn't have a hundred things to think of besides watching him. Heaven knows, I don't want him to get away any more than you do, but he seems possessed to do it. I didn't leave the gate open. Mrs. Minturn called a little while ago—

DELAVAN

[*Sympathetically.*]

I know you've got a lot to do. I'm just ashamed to have him crawling around that way. (*He pats her shoulder.*)

THE MAILMAN

[*Whistling and calling*] "Delavan!" [*hands in a letter.*]

THE SHADOW

[*As he goes out the gate.*]

Forget the gate! Forget the gate! (*He goes off, leaving it open.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Tyndale, sixty miles away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Oooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

THE SHADOW

[*To the child, who is just inside the door.*]

Grey! Green! Blue! Brown! See how smooth, how glistening, how round!

[*She coaxes him with the sphere, waving it before her. The child begins to crawl.*]

DELAVAN

[*To his wife, who is putting food on the table.*]

Mrs. MacMichaels was in this morning. She wanted me to give her more credit. But with that husband of hers I couldn't. I told her if she would pay half the old bill—but she can't, of course. I don't see why I should be called upon to trust them. (*He eats rapidly.*)

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Forgetful of the* MONSTROSITY *for a moment.*]

Nor I. I know it's too bad, and I'm sorry for her, but I don't see that you should be called upon to do it. I wonder what's keeping Harry so long? (*She goes to the door.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Before the child outside, waving the sphere in sinuous lines.*]

Thus and so, right and left, round and round.

[*The child rocks its head in time with the motion.*]

DELAVAN

[*Chancing to glance at the child and deeming the motion to be the result of idiocy.*]

Tct! Tct! Tct! It's too bad. (*He hides his distress behind a grave face.*)

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Returning from looking for her son.*]

I don't see him. (*She seats herself. They eat in silence.*)

THE SHADOW

[*The child following her.*]

Round and round, round and round. Pale grey! Pale blue! Dark! Light! Light! Dark! Light! Dark! (*The child crawls eagerly after.*)

HARRY

[*Entering a few moments later with Eddie in his arms.*]

Somebody's left the gate open again. The kid was right near it. Say, if we don't keep it closed he'll get out some day and right down on the tracks. He was just scramblin' along.

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Wearily.*]

Now, who could have done that! It must have been the mailman. (*She puts the child beside her on the floor.*) I think I'll have to tie a string around him. He's getting awfully restless these days. I never saw anything like it. (*She contemplates the years of misery and discomfort and distress which he represents, but reproaches herself for it all at the same time.*) I don't know whatever I am to do with him. I can't lock him up in a room all day all by himself. (*She closes the door.*)

DELAVAN

That makes it pretty hot in here, doesn't it?

THE SHADOW

[*Hovering over the child.*]

To hold this would be so wonderful—see round, blue, glistening! (*She waves it rhythmically. The child follows it with his eyes.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Wheatlands, forty-five miles away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Ooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

GALLOWAY

[*The engineer, wiping the dust out of the corners of his eyes and turning to* PETERSEN.]

Remember that cow we killed at Ellworth two years ago?

PETERSEN

[*Shoveling coal at his feet.*]

Yay-o.

GALLOWAY

[*Proudly.*]

They collected sixty dollars for that—so I understand. Utterson was telling me here a few days ago. (*He sticks his head out of a window and surveys the elbow of a stream that comes into view, then withdraws it.*) I never saw a cow tossed clean up in the air before. Her tail stood out as straight as a stick. (*He smiles and whistles for a crossing.*)

DELAVAN

[*Arising and shaking off the crumbs.*]

Well, I'd better be going now, I guess. (*He takes down his hat and coat.*) I don't see why he shouldn't play in the yard if we can keep the gate shut. (*He goes out.*)

HARRY

[*Fifteen minutes later, hanging around his mother's skirt.*]

Ma, I promised to pitch at a ball game at two o'clock. Can I go?

HIS MOTHER

[*Wearily, but sympathetically.*]

If you'll promise me faithfully to be back at five. You know what your father told you the other day. You ought to really stay here and help me mind the baby. (*He takes his cap and goes.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Moving before him to the gate.*]

Forget the gate! Forget the gate! (*He goes out, leaving the gate open.*)

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Hunterstown, thirty-five miles away.*]

Oooo-ee! Ooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Entering the front room for a moment.*]

And now I have that mending to do. And those pies. I think I'll do the mending first—no; I'll make the pies first. (*She returns to the kitchen.*)

THE SHADOW

[*Retreating before her.*]
I'll watch the child! Forget him! Forget him!
[Mrs. Delavan *commences paring apples, all thought of the child passing from her.*]

THE SHADOW

[*Before the baby on the walk.*]
Come!
[The Monstrosity *crawls eagerly after.*]

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Palmer's Station, fifteen miles away.*]
Ooooo-ee! Oooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

GALLOWAY

[*Watching a red barn recede in the distance.*]
Didjy see where Esposito got thirty days for that last shindig of his?

PETERSEN

[*Manifesting a proper interest.*]
No! You don't say! When did that happen?

GALLOWAY

[*Loftily.*]

Oh, last Monday. He come around the round-house, talkin' his usual guff, and they just took an' locked him up. It's thirty days for him now.

PETERSEN

[*Reverently and righteously.*]

An' it serves him good and right, I say.

GALLOWAY

That's what *I* say, too. These dago wipers! What good are they?

[*He blows for another crossing.*]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Paring in her kitchen.*]

These apples are not as good as bell-flowers for pies, but they'll do.

[*She casts cores and peelings away, mixes flour and rolls her dough.*]

THE SHADOW

[*Half way down the street to the track, the child following.*]

Such a pretty color. Blue! Blue as your mother's eyes! See how the light touches it here. See

how clear it is. If you had this in your hands you would be happy, happy, happy!

[*The child crawls, his eyes fixed on it.*]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Spreading the dough for the third pie.*]

This dough is really softer than it ought to be. It's so hard to get it just right. Those last pies—

[*She sprinkles a little flour on it!*]

THE SHADOW

[*Returning for a second and holding a pink-flowered dress before her eyes.*]

Do you remember this?

MRS. DELAVAN

[*A vision of the church door at Clarendon, a small town thirty miles away, and of herself entering it in this very dress, and Nate Saulsby passing her and looking at her admiringly, filling her eyes.*]

That was such a pretty dress. It had such nice frilled collars and cuffs. I wonder how Nate is doing now. He was a nice, handsome, clever boy.

[*Shadows of other girls and boys troop by—bits of crowds, country roads, country squares, a panorama of half-forgotten faces and places.*]

THE SHADOW

[*As* MRS. DELAVAN *dreams and the child crawls.*]

This ball is so perfect that if you had it you would be happy for ever and ever. It is perpetual joy, the color of peace. No need to seek for happiness elsewhere. Follow this—but take it from my hands, you will be happy. See—

[*She waves it near, then far, then near, then far.*]

THE MONSTROSITY

Ooogh! Bubblum!

THE FAST MAIL

[*Passing Rutland, five miles away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Ooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

THE SHADOW

Just a little farther! Soon you will have it now. Soon I will give it to you. When we reach the corner, when we get there where the steel rails shine—I will give it to you. Isn't it perfect! Isn't it blue! See how the light falls through it—clear as water.

[*She trips gaily backward, waving the sphere before her from side to side.*]

THE FAST MAIL

[*Entering the environs of Marydale at fifty miles an hour and only a mile away.*]

Ooooo-ee! Oooooo-ee! Ooh-ooh!

THE SHADOW

[*Hovering above the tracks a few feet in front of the child.*]

See, when you get here, right here, I will give it to you. The beautiful ball! The beautiful sphere! This you are to have when you get here—here! You will be so happy.

[*She coaxes, smiles and pleads.* THE MONSTROSITY *follows.*]

PETERSEN

[*To* GALLOWAY, *as he notes the outlying houses and ringing the bell.*]

I see they haven't started on that siding yet here. They were to begin yesterday, so Jaycox said.

GALLOWAY

[*On his seat by the window, a look of serene content on his face.*]

So I see. They couldn't get done at Linden, I suppose. (*He shifts his position for comfort and*

prepares to maintain silence as the train rounds a curve and the Wood Street crossing comes into view. Noting a wagon waiting at a minor crossing): They ought to put a gate or two more in this town. They need them. (*He blows the whistle.*)

THE SHADOW

[Hovering above THE MONSTROSITY, the blue *sphere in her hand.*]

Just a little farther, dearest. Only a little more, and then—

[*The child crawls out on the tracks as the engine rounds the curve, eight hundred feet away.*]

GALLOWAY

[*Stiffening.*]

By God! I believe that's a child on the track! Shake down the sand, will you? It is, as I live. Oh, Jesus!

[*He reverses the lever and throws on the air brakes.*]

PETERSEN

[*Leaping to the sand box.*]

Can't you stop her?

GALLOWAY

[*As the engine grinds and clanks, a frozen grip on the throttle.*]

No, by God! It's *too* late!!

[*The engine strikes.*]

THE SHADOW

[*Tossing the blue ball in the air.*]

There, my sweet, it is yours!

[*The ball falls into the child's hands.*]

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Hearing the whistle and shaking off her dreams.*]

The express! The baby! Good gracious! Where is it! (*She runs to the door, the gate, the street.*) Eddie! Eddie! Where is he, anyway?

[*She notes the train grinding to a stop at the corner and runs in that direction. A cold trembling seizes upon her.*]

GALLOWAY

[*Holding the air brake in a cutting grip, his face drawn and yellow.*]

I saw its face! I saw its face! I tell you! A beautiful child! I can never forgive myself for this.

Just a little baby, too. Not more than two or three years old.

[*He drops down as the train stops and runs back—the conductor, trainmen and passengers join. A large crowd, gesticulating and exclaiming, gathers.*]

A SCORE OF PASSENGERS

How dreadful! How terrible! What a pity!

[*Two women faint.*]

GALLOWAY

[*Explaining.*]

I didn't see it until we was right on it. I have three little ones of my own.

MRS. DELAVAN

[*Frantically making her way forward and falling on her knees.*]

My Eddie! My Eddie!

[*She screams hysterically and bends over.*]

THE SHADOW

[*Appearing to the bereft mother as she weeps over the broken body.*]

It is here, it is here, don't you see!

[*The baby, holding the blue sphere, appears to the mother's eyes. It smiles.*]

THE CONDUCTOR

[*To a passenger, as the train moves slowly and then a little faster.*]

Well, it's a God's blessing if a child had to be killed it was a deformed one, anyway.

A PASSENGER

You're right there.

GALLOWAY

[*A heavy, weary look on his face.*]

And I thought I was looking! The first child I ever killed in my fifteen years!

CURTAIN

III

LAUGHING GAS

Characters

Jason James Vatabeel, *an eminent physician.*

Fenway Bail, *a celebrated surgeon.*

Arthur Gailey, *house physician of the Michael Slade Memorial Hospital.*

Slason Tufts, *his assistant.*

Franklin Dryden, *an anesthetist.*

Demyaphon [*nitrous oxide*], *an element of chemistry.*

Alcephoran, *a power of physics.*

Shadows and voices of the first, second, third and fourth planes. Nurses and internes of the Michael Slade Hospital. The Rhythm of the Universe.

LAUGHING GAS

Scene

The operating-room of the Michael Slade Hospital, a glistening chamber of white porcelain and white tile. Nickel operating table in the foreground. Racks of surgical implements and supplies to either side. A strong, even light from the north French windows. Attendants in white bustling about preparatory to an operation. Enter Fenway Bail, an *eminent surgeon, and* Jason James Vatabeel, *his friend, a celebrated physician. They are followed by* Arthur Gailey, *chief* house physician; Slason Tufts, *his assistant;* Franklin Dryden, *the anesthetist, and two nurses.*

BAIL

[*A cool, sallow-faced, collected man of perhaps fifty-five, wise and incisive.*]

Well, Jason, here you are, a victim of surgery after all!

VATABEEL

[*Tall, gaunt, all of fifty-eight, very distinguished, a little pale from recent suffering, a bandage about his neck, beginning to loosen his shirt in front.*]

The last time I took ether I had a very strange experience or dream, one of the best of the etheric variety, I fancy. I am wondering whether it will repeat itself today.

BAIL

[*Examining a case of instruments, and busy with asides to* GAILEY *and others.*]

I was thinking of using nitrous oxide, unless you would prefer ether. It seems to me a little too much for a minor operation. I doubt whether I shall be four or five minutes in all. Just as you say, however.

VATABEEL

[*With a dry, medical smile.*]

Far be it from me to demand ether. I dislike the stuff intensely.

[*He begins to take off his coat and waistcoat and adjusts an aseptic apron.*]

BAIL

[*To* GAILEY.]

I shall want a retractor, clamps and thumb forceps. Are all the different ligatures here? Ah, yes,

I see. (*To* VATABEEL): Now, Doctor, if you will just make yourself comfortable. (*He indicates the operating table.*)

VATABEEL

[*Opening the neck of his undershirt and sitting down on the edge of the operating table.*]

I never imagined a small tumor could be so troublesome. (*To* BAIL): This is where Greek meets Greek, isn't it?

BAIL

[*When* GAILEY *has unfastened the bandage around* VATABEEL'S *neck, pressing the tumor lightly with his forefinger.*]

But not bearing gifts unfortunately—at least, not pleasant ones. This seems to be doing very well; no inflammation.

VATABEEL

[*Stretching himself comfortably, with, however, a sense of impending disaster or the possibility of it.*]

At least this is the end of my bother with it.

[*The gas tank is wheeled forward, the breathing cap adjusted.*]

THE ANESTHETIST

[*Taking his place at the doctor-patient's head.*]

Now, Doctor, if you please. We are only using

one-fourth strength to begin with. And don't forget the forefinger.

VATABEEL

[*Beginning to inhale and thinking of the mysteries of medicine and surgery and gases—to himself.*]

Ah, yes, the forefinger. I must keep that going, or try to, until the gas overpowers me and I can no longer do it. When it drops of its own accord they will know I am unconscious. Marvelous progress medicine has made in these last few years! It hasn't been ten years since we had to administer ether and gas full strength because we didn't know how to dilute them. And there weren't any anesthetists. (*He begins to crook his finger.*)

THE ANESTHETIST

[*One finger on* VATABEEL'S *pulse, the other on the siphon regulator.*]

That's very nice, Doctor, excellent. Breathe very deeply, please—as deep as possible.

VATABEEL

[*Continuing his thoughts, but taking a deep, full breath.*]

How self-contained and executive these young beginners are—just as I was in my day! Thus the

control of the world passes from generation to generation.

[*His face and ears begin to tingle. The fumes of the gas reach his brain. A warm, delightful stupor overcomes him. He imagines he is moving his forefinger, but he is not.*]

GAILEY

[*Noting the change.*]

Very full breath, Doctor, if you please. Keep the finger moving as long as you are conscious. (*The finger moves feebly once or twice; then ceases. The arms and legs become inert.*)

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!

VATABEEL

[*Functioning through the spirit only, conscious of tremendous speed, tremendous space, and figures gathered around him in the gloom.*]

Strange! Wonderful! Astounding! This is the same place I was in when I was operated on before. These are the same people. I hear voices. A most impressive company! (*The figures begin to converse.*) This is immensity—all space—that sur-

rounds me. I am not alive, really, and yet I am. Am I so important as this? How dark, and yet how strangely light! (*Feels a sense of great heaviness and great speed.*) This operating table is moving like lightning! Who are these people about me, not Bail or Gailey? (*He thinks to see, but cannot.*) This is something else. I wonder if I shall come out of this! Oh, the terror! I really don't want to die! I can't! There are so many things I want to do. People *do* die under the influence of gas.

[*The arc of his flight bisects the first of a series of astral planes.*]

ALCEPHORAN

[*A power of physics without form or substance, generating and superimposing ideas without let or hindrance. They come without word or form and take possession as a mood and as understanding without thought.*]

Deep, deep and involute are the ways and the substance of things. Oh, endless reaches! Oh, endless order! Oh, endless disorder! Death without life! Life without death! A sinking! A rising! An endless sinking! An endless rising!

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!

BAIL

[*Turning from the examination of the instruments and examining the eyes of* VATABEEL, *turning the lids up; to himself.*]

A remarkable man, very. Such sacrifices for his profession! How persistently he has scorned money. Great, and poor—that is my idea of a physician. (*To the anesthetist*) How is he now, Doctor?

DRYDEN

[*Who is holding* VATABEEL S *left wrist.*]

Very good, I think. (*He looks at* GAILEY *for confirmation.*) His pulse is one hundred and ten. His blood pressure seventy.

GAILEY

He is quite under.

BAIL

[*Lifting an arm and dropping it.*]

Excellent! (*To* GAILEY *and* TUFTS.) Turn him on his right side, please. The scalpel and the retractor, please.

[*He takes up a scalpel and makes an incision one and one-half inches long by one-half inch deep.* TUFTS *sponges the blood.*]

VATABEEL

[*An inert mass carried in the line of the earth's arc and becoming conscious of it, but unconscious of pain.*]

Oh, wonderful, wonderful! They are talking! It is light! It is dark! What is that they are saying? This rhythmic beat is so strange!

[*The arc of the earth bisects a second plane.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!

FIRST SHADOW

[*Of the second astral plane; a tall, grave man, seemingly with heavy dark whiskers and hair and deep blue eyes, surveying* VATABEEL'S *body as it speeds onward and he with it.*]

This man is of the greatest import, scientifically speaking, to his day. His trouble relates to Valerian, an element inimical to him. It is more serious than he thinks. It may be that he will not live. It may be that Valerian is unalterably opposed to him.

[*The voice becomes confused with other voices. Shadows gather about as though in conference. The operating table sweeps on at limitless speed.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

SECOND SHADOW

[*Seemingly near; a surgeon in contact with the wound.*]

Very serious! Very serious! It lies closer to the large artery than they think. In fact, it surrounds it. A separating shield may help. This man should not pe permitted to end yet. He is of great import to life.

[*Other figures gather about in the gloom and confer. The shadow increases. The voices cease.*]

ALCEPHORAN

No high, no low! No low, no high! Time without measure, measure without time. A rising, a sinking! An endless rising, and an endless sinking!

VATABEEL

[*Experiencing a vast depression as of endless space and unutterable loneliness.*]

Ah!!!

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

[*The earth sweeps onward in its arc, bisecting a third plane.*]

BAIL

[*Inserting a surgical spoon and scraping out the wound.*]

This thing is somewhat more serious than I thought. I believe the tumor surrounds the large artery. It has ramifications I hadn't thought were here. (*To* GAILEY *and one of the Nurses, bending over.*) Here are two side pockets to the left and one just below. And another! We'll have to tie up some of these veins before I can go any farther. This artery is abnormally near the surface, to begin with. How is his pulse?

[*He talks as he works, holding a bit of tissue up to the light, catching vein ends with hemostats, while* GAILEY *ties the knots with silk thread and the Nurses pass thread and sponges.*]

DRYDEN

[*In charge of the tank and feeding cone.*]

One hundred and ten.

BAIL

[*To himself.*]

Excellent.

VATABEEL

[*Sensing the line of the arc of his flight to be upward as yet.*]

Strange, I feel so comfortable, yet so helpless—Jason James Vatabeel, physician extraordinary, scientist. Of so much importance. Will I live? Will I die? Life is so treacherous, so sad!

FIRST SHADOW

[*Central figure of a new group, and a surgeon—as the operating table rushes into a new realm.*]

Difficult! Difficult! This man is in a very serious condition—much more serious than he imagines. The envy of elements! His services to life are in great danger. I am not sure that he can return to the world.

[*He shakes his head with grave, oppressive solemnity, while the other shadows seem to listen and articulate.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!

ALCEPHORAN

Deep below deep! High above high! No high! No low! Space beyond space! Singleness without unity! Unity without singleness!

VATABEEL

[*Awed and disturbed by the rush and confusion.*]

Spirits of the first order of earthly council. This mystery of living, how I have pondered it! Vast orders and powers of which I know nothing. The terror of the after life—what may it be—Death? Annihilation? No continuance?—Forever and ever? And in life itself—the mystery of the blood, of articulated bones, of organized society. Poverty, waste, hunger, pain, wealth, sickness, health—I have tried to think there was some good in what I've done. Vanity, hate, love, greed, patience, generosity. My fame is so wide, I know so little. (*He sighs deeply.*) Ah!

GAILEY

[*Noting the tendency toward greater vitality, and so toward consciousness.*]

A little more gas, perhaps. This cutting is affecting him.

DRYDEN

[*Administering more.*]

I think so.

BAIL

[*Gouging at a second sac.*]

This is apt to shake him a little. Perhaps ether would have been better, after all. It is going to take longer than I thought. How is your oxygen?

[*He is thinking of how much gas will have to be administered and how much oxygen may be required to restore the patient.*]

DRYDEN

[*Who has received his supply from the institution.*]

All right, I think. (*He tries it. The examination proves that it is dangerously low. To* WILLIAMS, *his assistant.*) See if you can find another tank.

[BAIL *frowns slightly, unconsciously irritated by the unpreparedness.*]

SECOND SHADOW

[*Of the second group—a stern, almost invisible figure.*]

I perceive near the cardiac region a tendency to weakness which is affected by gas. His condition is serious. Powers inimical and above us are at this

moment producing error. This man is a powerful thinker and original investigator. Of him much might be expected.

[*The operating table sweeps on. The* RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE *asserts itself.*]

VATABEEL

[*In vast depression, lying as under an immense, suffocating weight*].

Precarious! Precarious! And I do not want to die. I have so much to live for, so much fame to seek, so much to do. (*He sighs again.*)

DEMYAPHON

[*Nitrous oxide, also with the power of generating and superimposing huge ideas without let or hindrance, the capacity of the individual permitting. They come without word or form, taking possession as a mood or as understanding without thought.*]

So life is to be studied, and what for? Your little experiments! What do they teach you? You seek to find out, to know!

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

ALCEPHORAN

[*At an angle to the waves of* DEMYAPHON.]

Vast! Vast! Vast! Measure without time—time without measure!

DRYDEN

[*Noting* VATABEEL'S *pulse to be greatly depressed and shutting off the gas, at the same time turning on the remaining oxygen.*]

My assistant is long about that oxygen. See if you can find him, Miss Karns.

[*A nurse departs hurriedly.*]

BAIL

[*Realizing that he has a much more treacherous situation at hand than he had imagined and anxious for the security of his patient; to the anesthetist.*]

Don't let him get too low, Doctor. It is these extra pockets. I shall be done shortly. (*He hastens his efforts.*)

DRYDEN

[*Becoming disturbed over the delay of the oxygen, and lifting an eyelid to observe the condition of the patient's eyes.*]

Hm! I don't like the look of that. (*Aloud.*) Chafe his feet, Miss Hale. You had better move his arm up and down. (*The oxygen gives out.*) I don't understand this oxygen business.

MISS KARNS

[*Returning.*]

They have allowed the storeroom on this floor to run out. He has gone to the basement in the next building.

DRYDEN

[*Snapping his teeth.*]

Run and tell him to hurry—please. I am all out. (*She departs.*)

DEMYAPHON

[*Appearing only as thoughts placed in the dreamer's mind.*]

There is a solution, but you will never be able to guess it. It is ages beyond a growth, which, when it is passed, you will be unable to remember. Eons upon eons, worlds upon worlds. Far and above the mysteries here and below are other mysteries —deep, deep. You puzzle over the phenomena of man. In a vain, critical, cynical ambitious way you dream. It will all be wiped out and forgotten. To that which you seek there is no solution. A tool, a machine, you spin and spin on a given course through new worlds and old. Vain, vain! For you there is no great end.

[*A sense of ruthless indifference, inutility, futility, overcomes the spirit of* VATABEEL.]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

ALCEPHORAN

Behind, before, beneath, above, presence without reality—reality without presence.

FIRST SHADOW

[*Of a third group, vague yet clear, young, experimental, curious, indifferent, obviously operating as a surgeon in charge.*]

We shall soon be done with this now. He bleeds a lot, doesn't he? A bony old duffer! A ligature, please. A hemostat. I don't see why I should have been given this to do. They say he is needed. (*He seems to bend over. Other faces are near.*)

SECOND SHADOW

[*Seemingly operating in charge of the gas and nose cone.*]

It looks as though this gas might prove too much, Doctor. His pulse is a little feeble.

FIRST SHADOW

[*Indifferently.*]

That can't be. We are two periods this side the

danger mark on this plane. We can leave him until he reaches the next one. He's safe enough.

[*The operating table, like a bier, rushes on. The shadows recede. Once more darkness and space, and a sense of rigidity and tomb-like confinement.*]

THE ANESTHETIST

[*Anxiously.*]

Will you please go and see what's keeping them, Miss Hale? He can't stand this much longer. His pulse is one hundred and forty now.

[*Miss Hale dashes from the room.* BAIL, *conscious of the lapse of oxygen gas, increases his efforts to clean and close the wound.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

DEMYAPHON

[*Continuing.*]

So complicated that even the littlest things concerning man you cannot suspect. You think of forces as immense, silent, conglomerate, without thought, humor or individuality. I am a force without dimension or form, yet I am an individuality, and I smile. (*A sense of something—vast and*

formless—cynically smiling comes over VATABEEL, *though he cannot conceive how. He is conscious of a desire to smile also, though in a hopelessly mechanical way.*) I am laughing gas, for one thing. You will laugh with me, because of me, shortly. You will not be able to help yourself. You are a mere machine run by forces which you cannot understand. This life that you seek—you may have it on condition, by a condition. You will find out what that is a little later, yet you will not know for certain.

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

FIRST SHADOW

[*Of a fourth group—a young doctor—material, much more material than the last.*]

A little Valerian, please. Some iodine. Doing very well, don't you think, Doctor?

SECOND SHADOW

[*In charge of gas and feeder cone.*]

I am not so sure, Doctor. You will have to hurry. He isn't very strong. He should have been taken care of on the last plane. His eyelids—

FIRST SHADOW

[*Working briskly but indifferently.*]

Nonsense! That can't be. He's one point this side the danger mark on this plane. No hurry. He'll do well enough.

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

THIRD SHADOW

[*A nurse suggestive of mild materiality, bending over.*]

He's sinking, Doctor, I tell you. He can't go much longer. Look at his hands! Look at them! He ought to be hurried to the earth plane.

[*The bier rushes on into space. The voices fade and cease.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

[*Resuming.*]

Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om! Om!

ALCEPHORAN

A rising, a sinking! An endless rising! An endless sinking! Outward without inward—inward without outward. . . .

DEMYAPHON

Material planes that recede—each one more material than the other, as you sink to your own. Spirits almost more material than yourself. Because of the points spoken of as in your favor, you think you will regain life. You do not know that they are standards set by you in previous experiences, eons apart. To live you will have to attain to a new one now.

VATABEEL

Ah!

DEMYAPHON

Round and round, operation upon operation, world upon world, hither and yon, so you come and go. The same difficulty, the same operation, ages and worlds apart. Your whole life repeated detail by detail except for slight changes. Now if you live you must make an effort or die. (*The gas smiles.*)

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

DRYDEN

[*To* GAILEY.]

He can't get back, Doctor, unless we get the oxy-

gen here in thirty seconds. This tank is run out. His condition is desperate. (*He does the nurse's work, chafing one of* VATABEEL'S *hands; to himself*): If he does, it will be the most wonderful case I ever heard of. A new standard, by George. (*He wipes the perspiration from his brow.*)

VATABEEL

[*Struggling desperately to assist himself to live.*]

A thing of the spirit, this, plainly. I suppose I am a test but how futile so to be. Round and round and round, an endless, pointless existence. Yet I cannot help myself. I must live. I must try. I do not want to die. (*He makes a great effort, concentrating his strength on the thought of life.*) Oh how ruthless and indifferent it all is. Think of our being mere machines to be used by others! (*He struggles again without physically stirring.*)

MISS KARNS AND MISS HALE

[*Hurrying in.*]

Here it comes now!

THE ASSISTANT

[*In charge of tanks, following.*]

I had to go to the second building for the key.

The floor man was over there. (*He quickly couples the connections and the oxygen is turned on.*) Fine work, I call that!

DRYDEN

[*Bitterly.*]

What a system! And half a dozen important operations on today! (*He adjusts the cap and feeds the oxygen, full force.*)

VATABEEL

There is something vastly mysterious about this —horrible! In older worlds I have been, worlds like this. I have done this same thing. Society has done all the things it has done over and over. We manufacture toys—the same toys over and over. Does Life produce its worlds and evolutions the same way? Great God!

DEMYAPHON

[*Cynically.*]

The resistance which you are now displaying is in part by reason of your previous efforts and previous successes. You are the victim of experiences of which you have been made the victim. A patient, a subject, a tool, a method, round and round and round you go, a servant of higher forces, each time seemingly a step farther, each time in this way, for the same purpose, the same people, to no known end, over and over.

VATABEEL

Ah!

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

GAILEY

[*Disturbed by his weakened condition, and uncertain whether or not he can be revived.*]

I am afraid that you will have to hurry, Doctor. He is very weak. His pulse is scarcely distinguishable.

BAIL

[*Desperately scraping the last pocket and tying the veins.*]

I am not supposed to be handicapped by poor service in this institution. Try to hold him a few moments. (*To* TUFTS): Sponge! (*To the first nurse*): Scissors!

FIRST SHADOW

[*Of a fourth group just outside the gates of life, a very material young doctor, whose hands and white uniform are almost luminous.*]

Say, there isn't so much to do here—is there? A few stitches. Those veins ought to be clamped, though. (*He works briskly, lightly, with an inconsequential air.*) He'll do all right, don't you think?

SECOND SHADOW

[*At the gas tank.*]

Pretty weak, I should say. Gad, yes! He may hold out, though. They didn't shut off the gas on the last plane—that's a good sign. They usually do if it's serious. He's just at the turning point.

THIRD SHADOW

[*A nurse apparently impressed by the uncertainty of the occasion.*]

He's very low, I tell you, Doctor. Look at his nails. You'd better shut off the gas. He's nearly all in! Look at his eyes! He's william, I tell you. He's william. He can't live thirty seconds more.

[*An intense, disturbed rate of vibration indicates crisis. The second shadow shuts off the gas. The operating table rushes on into darkness.*]

VATABEEL

[*Thinking.*]

On, on—and I am now to die—I am dying, unless I can help myself! An endlessly serviceable victim—an avatar! The mystery of life—its gloomy complications! But I don't want to die! I won't die. (*He concentrates vigorously on the thought of life.*)

DEMYAPHON

[*Smiling.*]

The points which you established on your previous circuit of this orbit of materiality, and which have been counting in your favor, have now been exhausted. This safety mark, which you have heard frequently mentioned, you yourself established. If you live it will be by setting a new standard—rendering a new service but in an old way—over and over and over. Unless you struggle to live—unless you succeed in living—

VARIOUS VOICES

Try, oh try, oh try! You, above all others!

[VATABEEL *senses some vast, generic, undecipherable human need. He wishes to weep, but cannot.*]

THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE

Om! Om! Om! Om!

[*A sense of derision, of indifference, of universal terror and futility, fills* VATABEEL. *Suffocating, he tries to move.*]

ALCEPHORAN

Deep below deep! High above high! no beginning, no end! No end—no beginning!

VATABEEL

[*Terrified and yet seemingly helpless.*]

The dark! The dark! The ultimate dark! Plane upon plane! Eon upon eon! To do over and over! Or annihilation! Why—oh—why. But I won't die. I can't. (*He struggles again.*)

DEMYAPHON

It has no meaning! Over and over! Round and round! The orbit of which you are a part brings you back and back again and again in non-understanding. (*The thought seems to become rhythmic and painful.*)

VATABEEL

[*Struggling.*]

Am I really to die? Oh, no!! What if I do go round and round! I am a man! Life is sweet, intense, perfect! If I do go round and round, what of it? Beyond this, what? Nothing! I serve!

[*He stirs. His spirit struggles with materiality. The vital spark is rekindled within the inert frame. With a gigantic effort, it re-establishes itself and resumes control and respiration. The effort to inhale, feeble at the surface of materiality, is immense.*]

DRYDEN

[*Working the one free arm as vigorously as possible, while* MISS HALE *and* MISS KARNS *chafe his hands and feet.*]

There, he has caught it. Chafe his arms, Miss Karns. I am not sure that we can bring him round even yet. His vitality is amazing. I don't understand it at all. His heart was all right, though—extra strong.

BAIL

I shall have to have a few more seconds. I have three stitches to take. You may let him come out if you wish. This is the last time I shall use gas—here. I have had enough trouble with it before. (*He tries to think where.*)

DEMYAPHON

[*To* VATABEEL.]

And the humor of it is that it is without rhyme or reason. Over and over! Eon after eon! What you do now, you will do again. And there is no explanation. You are so eager to live—to do it again. Do you not see the humor of that?

[*With sardonic intent the rate of vibration which is laughter is set up in* VATABEEL'S *body. Even as he struggles to breathe and*

to regain his material state, he realizes that the impulse, a part of something vast, unearthly, mechanical, wavelike, is sweeping him into its rate. Weak from loss of blood—in danger of rupturing the large artery in the center of the wound, close to the surface, he begins to swell with pent-up laughter. A dry, hard, sardonic desire to shout overcomes him, although he is yet unable to move.]

DRYDEN

[*To* GAILEY, *noting the customary action of nitrous oxide as the patient approaches consciousness, and uncertain what to do.*]

He is coming to. I'm a little afraid to use more gas in his present condition, Doctor. If he laughs too hard—!!

BAIL

[*Irritably.*]

Can you keep him under ten more seconds? I have one more stitch to take. (*He takes one.*)

DRYDEN

I think he'll last that long, Doctor, anyhow.

[*Nurses and assistants seek to hold* VATABEEL

rigid in order that the operation may not be disturbed.]

DEMYAPHON

And I told you you would laugh. You will eventually forget why, but you will shout and shout and see no reason. I am the reason. I am the master of your personality. I am Demyaphon—Laughing Gas. Shout! Shout! Shout! (*It leaves him in a waking condition.*)

VATABEEL

[*As* Bail *takes the last stitch and* Gailey *begins the bandaging of his neck, seemingly bursting into consciousness, the wound still unbandaged, the pain of the needle still fresh.*]

Oh, ho! ho! ho!
Oh, ha! ha! ha!
Oh, ho! ho! ho!
Oh, ha! ha! ha!
Oh, ho! ho! ho!

GAILEY

[*Holding one arm to calm him, uncertain as to whether he is mentally clear or not—as yet.*]

Something very funny, Doctor?

BAIL

[*Accustomed to the effects of laughing gas, but disturbed by his patient's condition—to* GAILEY.]

Make those bandages very tight. I'm afraid of that wound. It is too bad we couldn't have kept him under longer. He's very close to death even yet. I scarcely had time to take those stitches properly. And, of course, the effects of the gas have to be the very worst possible. (*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

VATABEEL

[*Still shaken by the rate of vibration set up in him, his mouth open, his face a mask of sardonic inanity.*]

Oh, ho! ho! ho—oh, ha! ha! ha!
Oh, ho! ho! ho—oh, ha! ha! ha!
Oh, ho! ho! ho—oh, ha! ha! ha!

I see it all now! Oh, what a joke! Oh, what a trick! Over and over! And I can't help myself! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Oh, ha! ha! ha! And the very laughing compulsory! vibratory! a universal scheme of laughing! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Ah, ha! ha! ha! I have the answer! I see the trick. The folly of medicine! The folly of life! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Oh, ha! ha! ha! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Oh, ha! ha! ha! What fools and

tools we are! What pawns! What numbskulls! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Ah, ha! ha! ha!

[*His face has a sickly flatness, the while he glares with half-glazed eyes, and shakes his head.*]

GAILEY

I never saw gas act more vigorously. Did you, Doctor?

BAIL

[*Annoyed by the incident.*]

I never did. (*Taking his friend's arm.*) Come, Jason, you're all right now! Get over this! Just laughing gas, you know. It's all over. You have a serious cut in your neck. (*He presses his arm fondly.*) You're just laughing because of the gas.

VATABEEL

[*Wearily—with the sense of immense futility still holding him.*]

Oh, ho! ho! ho. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Just laughing gas! And that's why I laugh. Oh, ho! ho! ho! Ah, ha! ha! ha! I don't wonder it laughs! I would too! You would if you knew! The mystery! The cruelty! The folly! Oh, ho! ho! ho! Oh, ha! ha! ha!

[*He stares and glares the while his friends and*

hearers view him with kindly, condescending tolerance mingled with a touch of awe and amazement.]

BAIL

[*Genially.*]
Just the same, it's all over, Jason. Come on!

VATABEEL

[*Shaking himself and beginning to recover his natural poise and reserve.*]
And was it only the gas, then? That is very strange: I thought—I thought—I wonder? I wonder—? (*His mouth remains open.*)

DRYDEN

[*His calmness restored.*]
It seems odd to see *him* laughing like that.

GAILEY

The fumes are still in his head. He'll be all right now, though. That was a pretty close shave. I thought we had lost him. There'll be a new storekeeper here tomorrow, if I have my way.

THE SECOND ASSISTANT

I never saw Dr. Bail so irritated. He'll hold this against us.

[*The various doctors and nurses and assistants go about their duties.* BAIL *slowly leads* VATABEEL *to his automobile.* VATABEEL'S *face retains a look of deep, amazed abstraction.*]

CURTAIN

IV

IN THE DARK

Characters

John Repiso, *a fruit-peddler.*

Brady,
Bocock,
Dingwalter,
Train,
Kelly,
Syfax,
Emmett,
Bones,
} *Officers.*

Jacob Woitezek, *upholsterer.*

George Stephanik, *shoe-dealer.*

Fruit Dealer.

Old Woman.

The Ghost with the Red Eyes.

The Wraith.

Spirits, Passers-by, Voices of Various Dogs.

IN THE DARK

SCENE

Kerry Patch, adjoining the car-yards, at one in the morning. Long, dimly lighted streets, with here and there a gas lamp flaring in the wind. On the fourth floor of Kerrigan's flats—a detached, tatterdemalion row of buildings facing Eleventh Avenue—a dim light behind a tightly drawn curtain is suddenly put out.

FIRST SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]
A murder! A murder!

CALLAHAN'S GRAY BULL

[*In the next block north.*]
Wow! Wow! Wow! Gr-r-r—

SECOND SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]
A murder! A murder!

MOINYHAN'S HOUND

[*Three blocks east.*]

Yow-wee! Yow-wee! Yow-wee! —ee!—ee! (*subsiding with a whine.*)

THIRD SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]

A murder! A murder! A murder!

KORNBLUM'S GREAT DANE

[*From the back yard of his grocery store, three blocks south.*]

Ow-wow! Ow-wow! Ow-wow! Yoof! Yoof! Yoof! Ur!

A DOZEN DOGS

[*In all directions, taking up the chorus.*]

Ow-wee! Ow-wee! Yoof! Yoof! Ur! Ur! Ooo! Ooo! Ooo!

OFFICER BRADY

[*Stepping out of the family entrance of Dryheisen's Café, three blocks south, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.*]

'Tis a strange noise these dogs do be makin'. What's scratchin' them?

FIRST SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]
A murder! A murder!

OFFICER BRADY

[*Suffering an odd tremor of the flesh and adjusting his belt and revolver. He scratches his ear meditatively.*]
A windy night.

JOHN REPISO

[*Coming down the back stairs of Kerrigan's flats in the dark, the wraith of a new spirit before him, a vile ghost with red eyes behind. Over his shoulder a thick, brown bundle. He opens the door carefully and peers out.*]
Alla right so far. Musta no maka da noise. (*Peers out still further, sees a home-hurrying plumber and retreats.*) Jesu! Santa Maria! San Tomo! (*He wipes his brow with one grimy finger and listens until the steps die away in the distance.*)

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

[*From behind.*]
Fine! Fine! Ah, Life! Life! The smell of new blood! Fine!

THE WRAITH

[*Before.*]

Ah, me! Ah, me! Am I really dead? Where am I? I do not want to die!

A SCORE OF SPIRITS

[*Rushing from street to street.*]

A murder! A murder! Awake! Awake!

[*The dogs begin to howl as before.*]

JACOB WOITEZEK

[*Upholsterer, a victim of insomnia and Bright's disease, opening his window on the third floor opposite and leaning out.*]

Ach, I sleep so badly. I think I am going to die. What is all the noise? The dogs! They never sleep! Why do they howl?

A SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]

A murder! A murder! Awake! Awake!

JACOB WOITEZEK

[*A tremor passing down his spine.*]

Dark! And empty! The streets are very bare. When the dogs howl they say someone is dead. I

must go back or I will take more cold in my back. How they howl! (*He rubs his flabby, sickly face, looks up and down the long, dim street, and puts his hand on the window-frame to pull it down.*)

OFFICER BRADY

[*Strolling north, twirling his night-stick nonchalantly.*]

'Tis a great racket they make. Ye'd think they'ud lost their last fren'. Me gran'mother used to belave that whin dogs howled someone was dyin'. That was in the country. 'Tis different in the big cities, no doubt. (*He thumbs his belt and looks inquiringly around.*)

FIVE SPIRITS

[*Circling around him in a wreath.*]

A murder! A murder! Awake! Awake! Watch! Wake!

[*He feels the same tremor as before, and peers into every entry and storefront.*]

JOHN REPISO

[*Still waiting, but hearing no sound.*]

No can wait. They no can tell without the head. One, two, tree block! Then cars! Then alla right! (*He steps out.*)

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Courage! Well done! Fine! Fine! Ah! Life is fine! (*It keeps step behind.*)

THE WRAITH

[*Drifting on before.*]

Perhaps I am not dead. I must stay near. I do not want to die!

CHORUS OF SPIRITS

[*Clouding the air overhead.*]

A murder! A murder! Vengeance! Come one! Come all! Vengeance!

JACOB WOITEZEK

[*At his window.*]

There comes a man with a bundle at this hour in the morning. I wonder what is in it? He keeps close to that wall.

A SPIRIT

[*Sweeping by.*]

A murder! A murder!

GEORGE STEPHANIK

[*A shoe-dealer, coming home from a lodge meeting.*]

That was a fine business I did this afternoon.

Fourteen pairs in three hours. It is because of the cold weather. If I could do as well as that every day I would open a bigger store in a little while. In a better neighborhood, too. This is nothing—very bad, trash. But why do the dogs howl so?

[*There is continued yowling in near and far places.*]

THREE SPIRITS

[*Swirling about him.*]
A murder! A murder! Watch! Behold!

THE SHOE-DEALER

[*Hunching his shoulders, drawing his coat tight, and looking about him.*]

I don't like these dark neighborhoods. I never did. They are dangerous. Is that a man with a bag in the next block? He is going into Santangelo's, or the next place to it. But Santangelo is asleep. No, the man is just stopping there. What can he be carrying in a bag at this hour of the night?

THE THREE SPIRITS

[*Still swirling in a circle above him.*]
A murder! A murder! Watch! Watch!

THE SHOE-DEALER

[*Bustling on.*]

It is half-past one. It will be hard to get up again at seven in the morning. I do not like these late hours.

JOHN REPISO

[*Crowding into a dark doorway, waiting for the stranger to pass, and adjusting the bundle on his back.*]

Jesu! Santa Maria! San Tomo! One—two block more. Then no can see. Railroad track. No can tell. Come back same as any man.

[*He adjusts the bundle and grasps the handle of a knife in his shirt-front.*]

STEPHANIK

[*Passing by on the other side of the street and peering over.*]

There he is—someone waiting there. It is too dark to see. Someone with a bundle. There ought to be an officer hereabouts. They never do their duty, these police. You never can find one when you want one.

THE CLOUD OF SPIRITS

[*Over* SANTANGELO'S *door.*]

A murder! A murder! Come! Come!

THE THREE SPIRITS

[*Circling over* STEPHANIK's *head.*]
A murder! A murder! Come! See!

STEPHANIK

[*Unreasonably disturbed.*]
It is strange—that man! Why should he hide here? He may be trying to break into Santangelo's store! And these dogs! They make me creepy! If I could see an officer now!

[*He hurries on, looking right and left, for he is a great coward.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*Two blocks away, twirling his stick.*]
'Tis the divil's own night for dogs! I never heard the like!

[*He peers in at other doorways.*]

GEORGE STEPHANIK

[*Drawing nearer on the other side of the street, and crossing over to him.*]
Officer! I saw a man in the next block, there, on this side of the street, hiding in a doorway. He had a bundle over his shoulder. It looked to me as if he had broken in somewhere or was going to. He didn't want me to see him. There are so many thieves

around I thought you might want to see him. He is in Santangelo's doorway.

OFFICER BRADY

[*Stiffening with a sense of duty and adventure.*]

In the next block, you say? I'll have a look at him. Come along if you like.

[*Clouds of spirits wheel overhead, crying "A murder! A murder!"*]

JOHN REPISO

[*Peering out.*]

Alla gone! Two more block! No more can tell without the head! Jesu! I no meant he die.

[*He wipes his brow and starts.*]

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Fine! Fine! Two more blocks! The smell of new blood! Ah! Ah!

[*He keeps step behind.*]

THE WRAITH

[*Going before.*]

Am I alive? Am I dead? I must stay near. I do not want to die!

THE SPIRITS

[*Circling above in a great cloud.*]
A murder! A murder! Come one, come all!
[*The dogs begin to howl again.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*Sighting the figure in the distance.*]
There he goes now. That's the man ye mean, no doubt. Well, we'll have a look at what he has in that bag. Come, now.
[*He sharpens his pace.*]

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Hurry! Hurry! Ah, a good deed. Good life! Good life! Would that I were alive!

THE SPIRITS

A murder! A murder!

JOHN REPISO

[*Hearing steps and looking about.*]
Ah, Jesu! Ah, San Tomo!
[*He begins to run.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*Beginning to run, also, two blocks behind.*]

Come, now! None o' that!

[*He raps on the sidewalk with his night-stick, then extracts his police-whistle and blows a blast.*]

[JACOB WOITEZEK, *who has only just closed his window, opens it. Other windows fly open.*]

SPIRITS

[*Sweeping before one and all.*]

A murder! A murder!

JOHN REPISO

[*Turning into the car-yard.*]

Ah, Jesu! Ah, Santa Maria! Gratia Dio!

[*He slips between two lines of idle boxcars, dark and sombre, and hurries past ten before he deposits the bag under the trucks of one of them.*]

They may not find it yet. The police! That is my terrible luck, that there should be a policeman!

[*He slips under the cars, while spirits hover overhead, passing through the wood and steel, leaving the wraith beside the bag. Outside the whistle of* OFFICER BRADY *is sounding, the*

while other police-whistles answer from a distance, drawing nearer and nearer.]

THE WRAITH

[*Hovering over the body.*]
Am I dead? Am I dead? I do not want to die!

OFFICER BRADY

[*Turning into the yard.*]
We may have a job finding him in here. And the river is just beyond.
[*He blows new blasts.*]

OFFICER BOCOCK

[*Running up.*]
What's the trouble? What's the trouble?

OFFICER BRADY

A thief, be God! He's just turned in here with a bag. Right through here he went.

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*Arriving breathless.*]
What's the row?

OFFICER BRADY

Wait here and tell the others. A thief has just turned in here with a bag.

[*Other officers arrive. A spirited search begins. The place is surrounded.*]

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

[*At the heels of* REPISO.]

Fine! Fine! Well done! The body smells of blood! Fine!

THE SPIRITS

[*A cloud over each officer.*]

A murder! A murder! This way!

[*They pass to* REPISO *and then back to the officers. The air is vibrant with their motion.*]

REPISO

[*Stumbling out from the last line of cars at the water's edge, and surveying the retaining wall. The water flows silently below.*]

Jesu! No can swim! (*He hears the continued shrieks of many whistles and at the same time discovers a sewer-vent.*) Ah! Gratia Dio! Ah, Santa Maria! Gratia!

[*He seeks, via rocks and a projecting beam, to lower himself into it.*]

OFFICER BOCOCK

[*Reaching the water's edge and flashing a bull's-eye out over the wall.*]

This is where he would make for first.

[*He keeps a cocked revolver poised lightly in his hand.*]

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*Revolver and bull's-eye in hand.*]

I'll look after the other end, George.

OFFICER TRAIN

There's a sewer-vent here somewhere. He may make for that. (*He walks along the wall toward it. A police-boat passes. He calls.*) Shoot a light in here, captain, will you? We think a pigeon may have ducked in here.

[*The boat draws near and a powerful ray is flashed.*]

SPIRITS

[*Filling the air like gulls.*]

In here! In here! In here!

AN OFFICER

[*On board the boat, detecting* REPISO *crouching low.*]

Come out of that.

[*Revolvers are drawn. Three men are landed. They return with* REPISO.]

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

[*Close behind.*]
Ah, blood! More blood! Fine! Fine!

OFFICER BRADY

[*Forcing himself to the front.*]
Now ye'll be tellin' me what ye did with that bag ye had. Where did ye put it?

ANOTHER OFFICER

[*Shaking him roughly.*]
Come, now! Out with it! Where did ye put it?

JOHN REPISO

[*Cautiously.*]
No spika da Anglais.

OFFICER BRADY

Ye Guinea scut! It's no English, is it? Well, we'll make ye talk something before long. Bring him along, boys. The bag's here, if it ain't in the river. We'll soon be findin' it. Ye say it's not in the sewer there?

AN OFFICER

It's not in the sewer.

[*The air is full of spirits weaving between the body and the searching police. Determined effort is made by the former to transmit knowledge in terms of thought.*]

OFFICER KELLY

[*Of the fifth precinct, throwing a bull's-eye light between the trucks of each car of the second row.*]

Hi, now, here's somethin'! (*He reaches under and draws forth the bag.*) This'll be it, I'm thinkin'. (*He takes out a knife, cuts the cord and reveals the wet wrappings of the body.*) Mother of Mary! (*He blows his police-whistle.*)

OFFICER BOCOCK

[*Appearing.*]

You've found it, have you?

OFFICER DINGWALTER

This'll be more black-hand work, I'm thinkin'. Well, he'll talk English or somethin' like it before we get through.

[*Other officers attend. Spirits, a legion, thread and weave.*]

ms. 930
04 wheeler.

REPISO

[*Arriving with several officers, the light of various bull's-eyes on his face. To himself, sotto voce.*]

Jesu! Santa Maria! Me make me don't know.

OFFICER BRADY

Here ye are, my fine one. So that's what ye had in the bag? Now will ye speak and tell us where ye brought it from?

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*His hand on his collar, shaking him.*]

Come, now, speak, will you?

REPISO

[*Wet and blanched.*]

No spika da Anglais! No understan'!

OFFICER KELLY

[*Outraged by the horror of it.*]

We'll spika the English for ye, ye black scut! Ye'll swing for this.

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Newly arrived on the scene, and edging his way through.*]

A murder? Whaddye know about that! Is that the man? Say (*edging closer and peering into* REPISO's *face*), I think I know this fellow. He used to be hangin' around Kerrigan's flats when I did the day trick there. Where'd ye see him first?

OFFICER DINGWALTER

Brady saw him here in 11th Avenue somewhere.

OFFICER BRADY

[*Eagerly.*]

Sure, I thought that's where he might a been comin' from when I seen him with the bag. Them flats is full of Eyetalians.

OFFICER BOCOCK

We'd better take him down there then and see what we can find out.

[*The air is still thick with spirits weaving and threading; the red-eyed ghost standing behind* REPISO, *the wraith over the dead body repeating its vacuous plaint.*]

THE WRAITH

Am I dead? Am I dead?

THE RED-EYED GHOST

Blood! More blood!

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*Officiously.*]

That's the idea. Someone ring for an ambulance. Someone ought to stay here and look after this.

OFFICER KELLY

[*Too old to be eager for publicity.*]

I'll be lookin' after that.

[*The procession starts, with* REPISO *held by* DINGWALTER *and* BOCOCK *and followed by the ghost with red eyes. In front,* SYFAX *and* BRADY; *behind, Officers* TRAIN, BONES, EMMETT. *Over the body in the car-yards, the wraith. Overhead, a legion of spirits. The procession approaches the entrance to Kerrigan's flats.*]

OFFICERS SYFAX AND BRADY

[*To citizens who have crowded in before.*]

Out of the way there!

[*They make their way up the stairs to the first landing, followed by* DINGWALTER *and* BOCOCK *with* REPISO *and the others.*]

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Pounding vigorously on the door.*]
Hello! Hello!

[*An Italian fruit dealer puts his head out of the door.*]

FRUIT DEALER

[*Recognizing* REPISO *in the hands of the police.*]
What's da mat'? What's da mat'?

OFFICER BRADY

[*Irritably.*]
Cut that, ye heathen Guinea! Ye'll soon know what's da mat'. Did yez ever see this man before?

THE FRUIT DEALER

[*Fearing Italian retaliation.*]
No un'stan'! No spika da Anglais!

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Vigorously.*]
You lie, you hound! They're all in cahoots.

Somebody watch this man until we see about the others.

[OFFICER EMMETT *takes charge of the fruit dealer. They turn to another door.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*Beating it.*]

Hello! Hello!

[*He shakes the door-knob. An old woman puts her head out of the door.*]

OLD WOMAN

Whatever is the matter?

OFFICER BRADY

Tell me, now, have ye ever seen this man before?

OLD WOMAN

[*Unconscious of* REPISO'S *strain and terror.*]

Why, yes, that's Mr. Repiso. He's a nice man. Whatever are ye holding him for?

[*Repiso shivers convulsively.*]

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Facetiously.*]

A fine man, eh! Oh, perfectly good! What floor does he live on, old lady?

THE OLD WOMAN

The fourth. I'm very sorry, I'm sure. What's he done?

[REPISO *shivers again. The eyes of the ghost become vaguely luminous.*]

OFFICER BRADY

What *hasn't* he done! Be all the saints! Does he speak English?

THE OLD WOMAN

Sure he speaks English. He always speaks it to me.

REPISO

[*To himself.*]

Jesu!

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Blood! More blood!

SPIRITS

[*Sweeping in clouds through wood and stone.*]

Up here! Up here!

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*To* REPISO.]

I thought so. Now maybe you'll talk, Charley.

[*They mount the stairs.*]

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Pounding on the door.*]

Hello! Hello! (*No answer.*) Open the door! Hey! Open the door!

[*He presses to break it in.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*To* REPISO.]

Is this where yez live? Say!

OFFICER DINGWALTER

You might as well talk. It's all up with you, anyhow. It might do you a little good to be honest.

JOHN REPISO

[*Weakly, almost in a fainting condition.*]

No can spik. No un'erstan'.

SPIRITS

[*Swirling in circles.*]

In here! In here!

[*The door is broken down with a crash. They enter a tenement kitchen, oilcloth on the floor much worn, the stationary washtubs dirty and filled with junk, the walls painted a dull green and badly smeared. Beyond, a sitting-room*

badly arranged with cheap red-plush furniture, so worn that it looks as if it had been collected from ash-heaps. In one corner an imitation walnut table upset and the white marble top broken. A chair is piled on a black iron and wire couch. A zinc washtub holds the segments of a man's arms. In one corner of the room lies a roundish bundle. In another, on oilcloth, lies a pair of legs. In the zinc washtub on a newspaper are laid a small saw and a knife. Brooding over it all, the wraith, unconscious of duality.]

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Sweeping a bull's-eye around, then striking a light.*]

Well, I'll be damned! Here's a how-dy-ye-do! Whaddye know about this? He's been tryin' to cut him up into bits. Say, you're a wonder, Spaghetti! They'll make a hell of a noise over this.

[*He kicks the zinc tub with his foot, proud of his official association with so grim a crime.*]

OFFICER BRADY

[*Interested in the publicity he will get as the original pursuer, yet nauseated and anxious to have done.*]

Mother of Moses! And I thought he was a second-story man!

[*He sees the round bundle, suspects what it contains, but refrains from approaching it.*]

THE WRAITH

Am I dead? Am I dead?

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Blood! Good blood!

OFFICER DINGWALTER

[*Shaking* REPISO.]

Come, me fine man! What've ye got to say to this? Can't ye talk English now a little?

OFFICERS TRAIN AND BOCOCK

[*Crowding close.*]

Speak up now! Whadyu kill im for? Hey?

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

Blood! Good blood!

OFFICER SYFAX

[*Bringing forward the round bundle.*]

Here's somethin' else.

[*He unties the rough twine and reveals a gory head, black-haired and curly, with a short black moustache. At sight of the face* REPISO *falls on his knees, uttering a cry and rocking emotionally to and fro.*]

REPISO

[*Frenzied and incoherent, the while the spirits sweep and swirl.*]

No meana to kill. No maka da strong word, no maka da first blow! I alla time maka da safe word. He alla time follow me roun'. He my brod. Hata da job! Hata da work! No maka da mon! Alla time beg! Alla time maka da lie! Say he no can find job. Alla time maka da game. No maka da fair game. He cheata da cards. Showa da stiletto—taka da mon—Madre de Dio! No can see, no can hear. He grabba all what I got.

[*He raves on incoherently as to the details of the crime, the while the spirits weave and twine.*]

OFFICER DINGWALTER

That's the stuff. Now it's comin' out. Good for you, Italy!

OFFICER BONES

Sure, that's the way. They had a card game. This fellow gets sore and cuts him up. It's always the way with these spaghetti.

OFFICER TRAIN

[*Coming back from the legs.*]
Well, it's the chair for him, hey?

OFFICER SYFAX

Sure; not a ghost of a chance.

[*They ring for an ambulance. The coroner arrives. Officers, surgeons, gather up the remains. The lights are put out. The second representation follows them. Spirits fill the air, thinning and disappearing as they lead* REPISO *down the stairs.*]

THE GHOST WITH RED EYES

[*Glowing with a strange lustre.*]
Blood! More blood!

CURTAIN

V

THE SPRING RECITAL

Characters

Wilmuth Tabor, *an organist.*
An Old Door-keeper.
Mrs. Pence.
Mrs. Stillwater.
Two Lovers.
A Fawn.
Six Hama-dryads.
A Cat.
A Bum.
The Minister of St. Giles.
Three Priests of Isis.
A Monk of the Thebaid.

Troops of Fauns and Nymphs, clouds of Hags and Wastrels, persistences of Fish and Birds and Animals, various living and newly dead Spirits wandering in from the streets.

THE SPRING RECITAL

SCENE

A prosperous First Church in the heart of a great city. Outside the city's principal avenue, along which busses and vehicles of all descriptions are rolling. An idling sense of spring in the gait and gestures of the pedestrians. Surrounding the church a graveyard, heavily shaded with trees, the branches of which reach to the open windows exhaling soft odors. Over the graves many full blown blossoms, and in the sky a round May moon. In front of the church hangs a small lighted cross, and under it swings the sign, "Organ Recital, 8.30; Wilmuth Tabor, Organist." The doors giving into the church are open. The interior, save for the presence of a caretaker in a chair, is empty. On either side of the pulpit, below a great, dark rose window, burns a partially lighted electrolier. In the organ loft, over the street doors, a single light.

FIRST STREET BOY

[*To a companion, ambling to discover what the world contains, and glancing in as they pass.*]

Gee! Who'd wanta go to church on a night like this?

SECOND STREET BOY

I should say! Did you see the old guy wit de whiskers sittin' inside?

FIRST STREET BOY

Sure. A swell job, eh?

[*Their attention is attracted by an automobile spinning in the opposite direction, and they pass on.*]

AN OLD LADY

[*To her middle-aged daughter, on whose arm she is leaning . . . sympathetically and reminiscently.*]

The dear old First Church! What a pity its parishioners have all moved away. I don't suppose the younger generation cares much for church going any more. People are so irreligious these days.

THE DAUGHTER

Poor Mr. Tabor. I went to one of his concerts in the winter and there were scarcely forty people

there. And he plays so heavenly, too. I don't suppose the average person cares much for organ music.

[*They pass with but a glance at the interior.*]

A BELATED SHOE CLERK

[*Hurrying to reach Hagan's Olio Moving Picture & Vaudeville Theatre before the curtain rises, but conscious that he ought to pay some attention to the higher phases of culture—turning to the old door-keeper.*]

When does this concert begin?

THE OLD DOOR-KEEPER

[*Heavily.*]

Half past eight.

[*He glances at the sign hanging over the youth's head.*]

THE BELATED SHOE CLERK

Do they have them every Wednesday night?

THE OLD DOOR-KEEPER

Every Wednesday. (*The* CLERK *departs, and the old man scratches his head.*) They often ask, but they don't come in. (*He shifts to a more comfort-*

able position in his chair.) I see no use playing to five or six people week in and week out all summer long. Still, if they want to do it they have the money. It looks like a good waste of light to me.

[*Enter* MRS. PENCE *and* MRS. STILLWATER, two *neighbors of the immediate vicinity.*]

MRS. PENCE

[*A heavy, pasty-faced woman in white lawn—lowering her voice to a religious whisper as they pass through the door.*]

Yes, I like to come here now and then. I don't know much about music but the organ is so soothing. We had a parlor organ when I was a little girl and I learned to play on that.

MRS. STILLWATER

[*Short, blonde, and of a romantic turn, though the mother of three grown sons.*]

I just think the organ is the loveliest of all instruments. It's so rich and deep. (*They seat themselves in a pew.*) Isn't it dim here? So romantic! I love an old church. I don't suppose people want much light when they hear music. See the moonlight in that window over there. Isn't it lovely?

[*A pair of lovers enter.*]

THE BOY

I've heard of him. He's a well-known organist. I wish he would play a Chopin Nocturne or something of Grieg. I love Grieg.

THE GIRL

Oh, yes, the Solvieg's Lied. Isn't it still here!

[*They seat themselves in a remote corner. She squeezes his hand and he returns the pressure.*]

THE ORGANIST

[*A pessimistic musician of fifty, entering and climbing slowly to the organ loft, surveying the empty auditorium gloomily.*]

Only four people! (*He turns on the bracket lights, uncovers the keys, and adjusts the sheets of his programme before him. Surveying himself in the mirror, and then examining the opening bars of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D, he pulls out various stops and looks into the dim, empty auditorium once more.*) What a night! And me playing in this dim, empty church. It's bad enough to be getting along in years and to have no particular following, but this church! All society and wealth away at the seashore and the mountains and me here. Ah, well. (*He sighs.*) "Worse and worse times still succeed the former." (*He sounds a faint tremolo to test the air pressure. Finding all satisfactory, and noting*

that the hands of his watch stand at eight-thirty, he begins the "Overture to the Magic Flute.")

[*Enter through an open north window even with the floor of the organ loft, a horned faun, with gay white teeth, grimacing as he comes. He begins pirouetting. He carries a kex on which he attempts to imitate the lovely piping of the overture.*]

THE FAUN

[*Prancing lightly here and there.*]

Tra aa ala-lala! Ah, tra-la-la, Ah, tra-la-la! Tra-la-leee! Tra-la-leee! Very excellent! Very nice! (*He grins from ear to ear and spying the church cat, a huge yellow tom who is mousing about, gives a spirited kick in its direction.*) Dancing's the thing! Life is better than death, thin shade that I am!

THE CAT

[*Arching its back and raising its fur.*]

Pfhs—s—st! Pfhs—s—st!

[*The* FAUN *pirouettes nearer, indicating a desire to dance with it, whereupon the* CAT *retreats into a corner under the organ.*]

THE FAUN

Ky-ey-ey! You silly dolt! (*Kicks and spins away.*)

THE ORGANIST

[*Noticing the spit-fire attitude of the* CAT.]

He seems to see something. What the deuce is ailing him, now? I wonder whether cats do see anything when they act like that.

[*He yields to the seduction of the frail harmony, and closes his eyes.*]

THE BOY LOVER

Wonderful! So delicately gay and sad! It's just like flowers blooming in the night, isn't it?

[*His sweetheart squeezes his hand and moves closer.*]

[*Enter* SIX HAMA-DRYADS *from the trees without and circle about, wreath-wise under the groined arches of the ceiling. They are a pale, ethereal company, suiting their movements to the melody and its variations.*]

THE SIX HAMA-DRYADS

Arch of church or arch of trees,
  Built of stone or built of air,
Spirits floating on a breeze,
  Dancing gayly anywhere.

Out of lilac, out of oak,
Hard by asphodel and rose,
Never time when music spoke
But a dryad fled repose.

Weaving, turning, high and low
Where the purpled rhythms fall,
Where the plangent pipings call,
Round and round and round we go.

THE FAUN

[*Dancing forward and about them.*]
I can dance! Let me dance!
[*He grins in the face of one.*]

THE HAMA-DRYADS

Go way! Don't bother!

THE FAUN

Oh, don't be so fussy. (*He dances away by himself.*)

THE CAT

[*Prowling under the organ.*]
I saw a mouse peeping out of that hole just now. Wait! (*He crouches very low, ready to spring.*)

THE ORGANIST

[*Dreamily.*]

This passage always makes me think of moonlight on open fields and the spicy damp breath of dark, dewy wood, and of lilacs blowing over a wall, too. So suitable, but I would rather live than play. (*He sighs.*)

[*A gloomy ghost with hard green eyes enters from the sacristy, and pauses in a dark angle of the wall.*]

THE GHOST

[*A barrel house bum a dozen years dead, but still enamored of the earth.*]

What's doing here, I wonder? (*He stares.*) A lot of fools dancing. Hm! (*Turns and departs.*)

THE GIRL

Oh, Sweetheart, isn't it perfect? (*She lays her head on his shoulder.*)

THE BOY

Darling!

THE CAT

[*Springing.*]

There! I almost caught him! (*Peers into the hole.*) Just the same, I know where he is now. (*He strolls off with an air of undefeated skill.*)

THE ORGANIST

[*Missing a note.*]

This finale isn't so easy. And I don't like it as well, either. I always stumble in these allegro movements. (*He wipes his brow, improvises a few bars, interpolating also a small portion of the triumphal march from "Aïda."*) This is different. I can do it better.

MRS. STILLWATER

[*Shifting her arm and moving her knee.*]

I never like loud music as well as the softer kind. That middle part was beautiful.

MRS. PENCE

Well, I can't say I like loud music, either, but now this——

[*He begins upon the Grail motif from "Parsifal."*]

THE SIX HAMA-DRYADS

[*Still circling.*]

Rose of fancy, gold of soul,
Of all fragrance taking toll,
Of all rhythm weaving wiles,
We, the fabric of all smiles.

[*They cease dancing and drift out of the window, followed by the* FAUN. *As they do so*

an English Minister, *once of St. Giles, Cirencester, who died in 1631, a* Monk *of the Thebaid, A. D. 300, and three* Priests of Isis, *B. C. 2840, enter. On detecting the odour of reverence, they materialize themselves to themselves as servitors of their respective earthly religions—the Egyptians in their winged hoods, the monk of the Thebaid in his high pointed cowl, the Minister of St. Giles in his broad-brimmed hat with high conical crown, knee-length coat, and heavy, silver-buckled shoes.*]

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*To himself.*]

An unhappy costume this that I wear, yet it is all that identifies me with my former earthly self, or with life. (*He notes the Egyptians and the monk, but pays no attention to them for the moment.*)

FIRST PRIEST OF ISIS

[*To his brothers.*]

A house of worship, I take it. How the awe of man persists. I thought I detected exquisite and harmonious vibrations here.

SECOND PRIEST

[*Tall and severely garbed, yet in the rich colors of his order.*]

And I. It is melody, I feel the waves.

THIRD PRIEST

[*Signing in the direction of the organist.*]

There is the musician. How pale his emanation. He is arranging something. And here is a very present reminder of one of our earthly stupidities. We worshiped the forerunner of that in our day. (*He motions to the church* CAT *who strolls by with great dignity. They smile.*)

THE CAT

[*Surveying them with indifferent eyes.*]

At least I am alive.

FIRST PRIEST

[*A master of astrology.*]

Small comfort. You will be dead within the year. I see the rock that ends you. Then no more airs for you.

THE MONK OF THE THEBAID

[*To himself.*]

This is a religious edifice—heavily material but of small pomp—Christian, possibly. That spirit yon-

der (*he surveys the minister of St. Giles*) was also a priest of sorts I take it, and these three Egyptians—how they strut! They give themselves airs because of the memory of them and their rites that endures in the world.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*Surveying the monk.*]

A sombre flagellant. I wonder has he outgrown his earthly illusion! (*He approaches.*) Brother—do I not meet an emancipated spirit?

THE MONK

You do. Centuries of observation have taught me what earthly search could not. I smile at the folly of this. (*He waves an inclusive hand about him.*)

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

And I, I also—though I was of stern faith in my day, and of this very creed. Even now I suspect some discoverable power worthy of worship. My mere persistence causes me to wonder though it does not explain me to myself.

THE MONK

Nor does mine to me, nor the persistence of their seeming reality to them. (*He points through the transparent walls of the church to where outside*

moving streams of shadows—automobiles, belated wagons, and pedestrians are to be seen—and to the lovers.) Yet there is no answer that I can discover —at least I drift and speculate. How much longer shall we persist? I often ask myself. They (*he waves a hand at the mass outside*) have their faith, futile as it is. A greater darkness has fallen on you and me. Endless persistence for us if we must, let us say, but merging at last into what?

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

Ay, what! And when I died I imagined I should meet my maker face to face.

THE MONK

[*Smiling.*]

And I the same. And they—(*He nods toward the Egyptians*)—their gods were as real to them,—shadows all of the unknowable.

THE ORGANIST

[*Plunging into the minor-theme, which speedily dies off into unfathomable mysteries of bud notes and tones.*]

I wonder if I'm boring them by this heavy stuff. Still what do I care? There are only four.

[*Nevertheless he passes from the Grail motif into the dance of the flower maidens.*]

THE BOY

Isn't it lovely!

THE GIRL

Perfect!

THE ORGANIST

Lovely and very difficult. These pedals are working rather stiffly,—and that automobile has to honk just now.

[*He fingers lightly three notes of a major key indicative of woodland echoes and faint bird notes. Re-enter the barrel-house* BUM, *who is seeking anything that will amuse him.*]

THE BUM

Still playing! Hell! And there are those two old stuffs of women. Not an idea between 'em.

[*He turns to go but catches sight of the monk and the Egyptians. He pauses, and then turns back.*]

THE MONK

[*Addressing the Egyptians.*]

Soothing harmonies these! Most strange combinations, the reason for which we cannot guess, the joy and beauty of which we know. I find earthly harmonies very grateful.

FIRST PRIEST

And I. But I cannot fathom the origin of them.

[*He observes the* Bum *and dematerializes to avoid him. The others follow. When they reappear in another part of the church the* Bum *instantly pursues them.*]

THE BUM

[*Staring interrogatively and irritatingly at the monk and the Egyptians, who, however, pay not the slightest attention to him.*]

You thought you knew somepin' when you were alive, didn' jah? You thought you were smart, huh? You thought you'd find out somepin' when yuh died, huh? Well, yuh got fooled, didn' jah? You're like all the other stuffs that walk about and think they know a lot. Yuh got left. Har! Har! Har! (*He chortles vibrantly.*) I know as much as you fellers, and I've only been dead a dozen years. There ain't no answer! Har! Har! Har! There ain't no answer! An' here you are floatin' aroun' in them things! (*He indicates their dress.*) Oh, ho, ho! (*He grins maliciously and executes a crude clog step.*)

THE MONK

[*Repugnantly, and pulling his cowl aside.*]

Away, vile creature—unregenerate soul! Has

even the nothingness of materiality taught you nothing?

THE BUM

[*Straightening up and leering.*]

Who's vile? What's vile? (*He thinks to become obstreperous but, recalling his nothingness, grins contemptuously.*) You think you're still a monk, don' jah? You think you're good—better'n anybody else. What jah got to be good about, eh? Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho! Ah har, har, har, har! He thinks he's still a monk—say, cull—!

FIRST PRIEST

[*To the monk sympathetically.*]

Come away, friend. Leave him to his illusions.

SECOND PRIEST

Time alone can point out the folly of his mood. Let us vanish.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*Drawing near and scowling at the* BUM.]

Out, sot!

THE BUM

[*Defiantly and yet indifferently.*]

Who's a sot? An' where's out? Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho!

THE ORGANIST

[*Passing into the finale.*]

And this is even more beautiful. It suggests graves and shrines—and fauns dancing. But I don't propose to play long for four people——!!

[*A troop of* Fauns *and* Nymphs *dance in, pursuing and eluding each other. The* Six Hama-dryads *return, weaving and turning in diaphanous line. A passing cloud of* Hags *and* Wastrels, *the worst of the earth lovers, enticed by the gaiety of sound, enter and fill the arches and the vacant spaces for the moment, skipping about in wild hilarity. The* Bum *joins them, dancing deliriously. Persistences of fish and birds and animals, attracted by the rhythm which is both color and harmony to them, turn and weave among the others. Ancient and new dead of every clime, enamored of the earth life and wandering idly, enter.* A Tired Pedestrian of *forty, an architect, strolling for the air and hearing the melody, enters. After him come spirits of the streets—a doctor and two artisans, newly dead, wondering at the sound.*]

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*Noting the flood of hags and wastrels.*]
And these horrible presences! Succubi! Will they never get enough of materiality?

THE MONK

In my day the Thebaid was alive with them—the scum of Rome and Alexandria, annoying us holy men at our devotions.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

Do you still identify yourself with earthly beliefs?

THE MONK

A phrase! A phrase! In the presence and thought of materiality I seem to partake of it.

FIRST PRIEST

And I! A sound observation!

THIRD PRIEST

The lure of life! It has never lost its charm for me.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*To himself.*]
Nor for me.

THE FAUN

[*Cavorting near, his kex to his lips, piping vigorously.*]

Heavy dolts! Little they know of joy except to stare at it.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*Indicating the* FAUN.]

And this animal—to profane a temple!

THE MONK

[*Mischievously.*]

And do you still cling to earthly notions of sanctity?

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

I hold, as I have said, that there must be some power that explains us.

THE SIX HAMA-DRYADS

[*Dancing and singing.*]

Round and round a dozen times,
Three times up and three times down,
Catch a shadow circlewise,
Fill it full of thistle down.

Fill it up and then away—
How can stupid mortals know
All the gladness of our play—
Where the dew-wet odors blow,
Round and round and round we go!

THE BUM

[*Spinning near.*]
This is glorious! Gee!

FIRST PRIEST

[*Unconscious of anything save the charm of the rhythm.*]
Sweet vibrations these. But not our ancient harmonies. In our time they were different. Would that I could dance thus!

SECOND PRIEST

Our day! Our day! Endless memories of days. Oh, for an hour of sealed illusion!

THE BOY LOVER

Isn't it perfect!

THE GIRL

Divine! It's like a dream, and I want to cry.

THIRD PRIEST

The harmony! The harmony! (*He calls his friends and points to the* Boy *and* Girl. *The three approach and stand before the lovers, viewing them with envious eyes.*) In ancient Egypt—on the banks of the Nile—how keen was this thrill of existence! How much greater is their reality than ours! And all because of their faith in it.

THE MINISTER OF ST. GILES

[*Heavily.*]
I grieve for life, brother.

THE MONK

And I also. Would that I might return! (*They sigh.*)

THE ORGANIST

[*Finishing with a flourish.*]
Well, there's the end of my work tonight.

[*He closes various stops, begins to gather up his music and turn out the lights. The* Dryads *and* Nymphs *flood out of the windows, followed by* Fauns, Hags, *and* Wastrels. *The green-eyed* Bum *starts to go, but pauses, looking back wistfully. The* Egyptians, *fading from their presence as such, appear only as pale flames.*]

MRS. STILLWATER

[*Pluming herself.*]
Now that was lovely, wasn't it?

MRS. PENCE

Charming, very charming!

THE BOY LOVER

Don't you love Wagner?

THE GIRL

I do! I do!
[*In the shadows they embrace and kiss.*]

THE ORGANIST

[*Wearily, as he bustles down the stairs.*]
Why should I play any more for four people? It's nine o'clock. A half hour is enough. At least I can find a little comfort at the Crystal Garden.

[*He thinks of an immense beer place, and shrugs his shoulders the while. The old doorman, hearing him go out, prepares to put out the lights.*]

MRS. STILLWATER

[*Rising.*]
I do believe it's over.

MRS. PENCE

Well, there are so few you can scarcely blame him.

THE BUM

[*Gloomily.*]
Now I gotta find somepin' else.

THE CHURCH CAT

[*Prowling toward the organ loft in the dark of the closed church.*]
Now for one more try for that mouse.

CURTAIN

VI

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

Characters

Truro Kindelling, *a social butterfly.*
Laura, *his wife.*
John Kitts, *a prosperous hat dealer.*
Tubbs, *officer of the beat.*
Burton, *the butler.*
Miss Worth Budd, *spinster.*

A Millionaire Iron Manufacturer,
A Messenger Boy,
A Lawyer,
A Scrub Woman,
A Department Store Manager,
A Dish Washer,
A Young Scribbler,
A Shop Girl,
Mrs. Couples, *a neighbor,*
Mrs. Arthur Deeker,

} *Passers-by.*

Hand Organ.

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

Scene

The best residence section of an old but fashionable district in the heart of a great city. To the east and west and south large districts of trade and manufacture. Crowds of workers and organizers of all degrees of ability and prosperity pour across and through it at all hours. At the corner of two intersecting streets where the tide of traffic is heaviest a large square brick house with white marble steps and window lintels. A wide parquetry stone walk leads to the front door and about one side of the house to the rear. A low box hedge encloses uniform lawn spaces. Square French windows are decorated at the bottom by boxes containing dwarf evergreens and English ivy sufficiently hardy to survive the winter. The interior faces of the windows are fitted with thin net of delicate texture and the sides draped with warm yellow brocade, visible from the street in the daytime or when the interior is lighted at night.

On the outside, of a late December evening,

heavy flakes of snow are falling and the street is already white. Interiorly the rear parlor is lighted by a tall lamp, shaded with yellow silk. Looking in through the windows a fire, judged by a flickering glow, is burning somewhere. Before it, not visible from the street, a man and woman, the former standing, the latter sitting. Outside the ruck of traffic and pedestrians, the majority of whom give the old house at least a passing glance.

A MILLIONAIRE IRON MANUFACTURER

[*Speeding north in his brown limousine, to a wealthy customer whom he is taking home to dinner.*]

One of the oldest and prettiest residences of this section. I once tried to buy it! Owned now by the Kindellings—one of the best families here. (*They speed past.*)

JOHN KITTS

[*A prosperous hat dealer, to* Officer Tubbs, *whom he has encountered on his way home, talking on the street corner opposite.*]

Yes, old Col. Kindelling used to be a great figure around here. I've seen him with his boy who lives over there now—a big, broad-chested, side-whiskered man. The mother's a hard, cold, clever woman, they

say. I've seen her, too, but not often. I don't know much about the boy.

OFFICER TUBBS

[*With an air of knowing much more than he cares to communicate.*]

Many's the time I've seen him comin' in with more than was good for him—and her, too.

MR. KITTS

[*With a thought to his own children*].

What the father earns the children spend.

LAURA KINDELLING

[*Formerly the principal of the Lyceum Players, and the heroine of an unsanctioned society-theatrical marriage, rising and walking irritably to the mantel. She is of medium height, lithe, graceful, with a wealth of brown hair, and trailing an afternoon gown of green velvet. Her hands are unfortunately much too plump—her face the rounded oval of the petted beauty.*]

You know I never said that! I never gave her the least cause to take offense. She's never forgiven you for marrying me, that's all. She resented it from the first, and she resents it now. Has she ever called

on us except to suggest that you go somewhere without me? Has she ever written a letter that hasn't had a criticism or a suggestion that wasn't directed against me in it? Has she—I ask you?

A MESSENGER BOY

[*Passing and observing the glow in the window through the snow.*]

Gee! I wish I could live like dat! It must be nice to be rich.

GEORGE WILSON ATTERSON

[*A sentimental lawyer, living at the Elzevir Club in the next block.*]

The snow gives that doorway a very artistic look in this light. Red brick through snow is very effective. And that yellow light! If I could only find the right woman and establish a comfortable home like that. (*His footfalls sink noiselessly into the fresh fallen snow.*)

TRURO KINDELLING

[*A sleek, languid, carefully dressed individual of good height, but no great force—disturbed and bored, and finding it difficult to conceal his mood, but admitting to himself the truth of his wife's charges. One carefully poised*

hand is twirling first one and then the other of a handsome pair of mustaches. The other is resting on the mantel.]

But, Laura! I know you don't understand mother. I'm sure you never have. She isn't as tactful as she might be—at times—owing to her affection for me, perhaps; but as to that, if you didn't take such a savage attitude—

LAURA

[*Irritably and scornfully.*]

Savage attitude! Tactless! I'd like to know who has been savage if she hasn't. She didn't try to get you to come and visit Great Oaks alone the third week we were married, did she? She didn't get you to stay there two weeks when you only went to stay a day—did she?

TRURO

[*Lying whole-heartedly.*]

But she was sick when I got there—

LAURA

Sick! Sick! Yes, I know how sick she was. She wasn't so sick but what she could go to the Redowa's house party and the Shadow Plains Hunt, and you with her. Oh (*as* KINDELLING's *eyes lift*), you needn't try to deny it. I *know!* Kitty Stapleton was there and she told me. (KINDELLING *abandons*

his hope of lying out of it and relaxes his eyes.) And all the time I thought you were telling me the truth.

A SCRUB WOMAN

[*Making her way toward one of the office buildings south.*]

Ah, the rich have the easy time! No worries . . . and the warm fire . . . and the good bed. . . . (*She pulls unthinkingly at her brown shawl, and trudges on.*)

TRURO KINDELLING

[*Thinking as* LAURA *talks.*]

Mother really does dislike her terribly. I never imagined she could be so bitter. I'll never get a dollar of the estate as long as she can prevent it—as long as I stay with Laura. She is even going to hold up that inheritance of Uncle Will's unless I divorce her and marry some one she approves of—and on the ground of incompetence. If I sue! Gad! And yet she loves me. I don't know but what she's right at that. Laura isn't in our set, and I can't put her there. (*He decides what to answer.*) The fact is we went both times because she was feeling so bad that I thought the outing would do her good. She was sick all right.

LAURA

Oh, was she? Well, you forget that you told me that you hadn't gone anywhere. That your mother

had been too sick to leave the house! (*Her lip curls contemptuously.*)

KINDELLING

[*Not recalling that he ever made such a statement, but judging it to be true.*]

When did I say that? I don't recall making such a statement. (*To himself.*) Gad! She has a sharp tongue! Perhaps mother's right. I did make a miserable mistake in marrying her. She's beautiful, but she's slovenly, and she never takes the hair out of her comb. Now Althea Cameron—— (*He thinks to find an opportunity to pet her and so soften her mood.*)

A BRISK DEPARTMENT STORE MANAGER

[*In charge of white goods at Swinton's—Christian, home loving, believing in all the conventions as preached.*]

Now, that is what I call a lovely home. All peace and quiet and family affection. Hard-earned, no doubt. After all, prosperity depends on moral order and honesty. People get rich and stay rich because they deserve to.

[*He eyes a shabby restaurant dish washer who is passing with suspicion as to his moral worth.*]

THE DISH WASHER

Gee! That light through the snow makes me think of Christmas. I wish I could buy Annie a new coat.

MRS. KINDELLING

Why, just after you came back. You have an awfully poor memory, Truro. You're not the one to try to lie out of things. (*She smiles superiorly.*) You're letting your mother poison your mind against me in spite of anything I can do or say. I can tell.

KINDELLING

What do you mean—poisoning my mind? I don't see that I've changed any. (*He resumes his former position before the fire.*)

MRS. KINDELLING

[*Bitterly, and with a touch of heart pain as she recalls the intoxication of the first six months.*]

Oh, don't you! You don't recall how you laced my shoes and corsets every morning, do you! Or that you insisted on buttering my bread and sugaring my coffee, and bringing me my negligee. (*She represses a tendency to sob.*) You've done those things every day this year, haven't you? (*Her eyes harden as she thinks of his mother.*)

KINDELLING

[*Wincing at the memory of his lapsed passions, but desiring not to revive them, and yet failing to connect the change with his mother.*]

Do you mean to say that I haven't done any of those things this year?

MRS. KINDELLING

[*Her eyes swelling confutingly.*]

You know you haven't!

KINDELLING

[*Defiantly, and not wishing to put himself in a position where more billing and cooing will be necessary.*]

Well, anyhow, I don't see how you can connect mother with that.

MRS. KINDELLING

[*Realizing that another affectional transport has eluded her, and troubled by the ominous import of his indifference.*]

It's always mother, never me. How can you stand there and say that she isn't poisoning your mind when over eight months ago you were planning to sue if your inheritance wasn't released and here you are, just where you were before. First she was sure to

love me and we were to live at Great Oaks; then after she refused to have anything to do with me, you were going to stay away from her and let her do as she pleased; we were going to live in Europe; then you had to go there and try to persuade her to give you what is yours, what you could get by sueing. Now there isn't a week goes by without your spending at least two or three days with her, and maybe more. It's mother here and mother there, and mother this and mother that, while I sit here and get no more consideration than a housekeeper or a servant. (*Her eyes blaze.*)

KINDELLING

[*Thinking of Althea Cameron—the daughter of the millionaire bond broker—whom his mother favors and to marry whom his mother plans to have him divorce his wife. He sees her slim, aloof, not nearly so animal or tactless as* LAURA. *On marrying her his mother's fortune would come to him without question—as well as Althea.*]

Well—she's my mother, isn't she? You don't expect me to ignore her entirely? Besides—she has me in her power—you know that. What can we do without money? We've talked it over lots of times. She can keep my share of father's fortune or give it away if she wants to. It was left entirely to her. (*A vision of his father's contempt for him clouds his*

thought for a moment.) As for that eighty thousand Uncle Will left, I know she hasn't any right to keep it back, but she threatens to declare me incompetent if I sue her. (*He assumes as good a look of injured innocence as he may.*)

LAURA

[*Turning on him bitterly.*]
Is that why you have changed toward me?

KINDELLING

[*To whom the idea comes as a blow.*]
Why no, certainly not. What makes you say that I have changed when I haven't?

LAURA

[*Heavily and sneeringly.*]
No, you haven't. But you're preparing to go out for the third time this week to your mother's! That isn't any sign of change, is it? Oh, I know what she wants! You needn't try to deceive me! She thinks I can be bought off, and you can marry someone else, —that Althea Cameron she and you are always going around with. You think I don't know, don't you? You think I'm a silly fool. Well, I'll show you and her. (*She walks passionately toward one of the front windows and begins to sob.*)

BURTON

[*The butler, who has been requested to order the car, entering from the dining room.*]

The car's here, sir.

KINDELLING

[*Remorseful for the moment, but noting that she is less graceful than Althea Cameron, and that her face takes on unsatisfactory lines when crying.*] Very well, Burton. (*To* LAURA):

Now, Laura—really you are impossible at times. Whatever put such an idea in your head? You know it isn't true. I promised her to go. My troubles are certainly enough without your adding to them. You must see how it is. (*He approaches to lay a consoling but indifferent hand on her.*)

A YOUNG SCRIBBLER

[*An assistant magazine editor and self-imagined poet—seeing the car in front and her in the shadow, outlined against the light.*]

Ah, the lovely woman! A maiden—probably dreaming of love! And wealthy! If only some rich and beautiful girl would fall in love with me. A house like that and an automobile.

[*He stiffens himself so as to present his best address and walks stiffly by. His thoughts*

are on how well he would look paying court to one such in an exceptional parlor.]

MRS. COUPLES

[*A resident of one of the side streets, a simple, homely housewife, fond of her husband and her children—noting the glow of the windows in the deepening gloom.*]

That house always looks so charming, so well kept. It must be a happy family that lives there. They certainly love flowers and they have everything to make them happy.

BURTON

[*The butler, surveying Schrieber, the gardener, who is packing in a small tree for the winter in the back yard.* BURTON *is comfortably lounging in the warm dining room.*]

'E might 'a' done that a month ago, the loafer. And the 'edge not clipped this fall either. (*He sniffs.*)

A LITTLE SHOP GIRL

[*Bustling home, full of impossible romance, and surveying the windows and the car with bursting sentiment.*]

Oh, to be rich! And happy! (*She pictures a society youth imploring her to be his.*)

OFFICER TUBBS

[*Beating the lamp post with his club, and still talking to* Mr. Kitts.]

I saw that Truro Kindelling riding with his wife here the other day. His name was in the paper not long ago. He won some coaching prize or other.

MR. KITTS

Oh, yes, he's well known for that. There's some trouble between his mother and the daughter-in-law as I understand it. Old Colonel Kindelling didn't think much of his son, I guess. He left everything to his wife to do with as she chose.

OFFICER TUBBS

These rich sons don't know what to do with their money—half of them. (*He strikes an attitude indicative of his own ability as a careful citizen.*)

LAURA

Don't touch me! Don't come near me! I know how it is. I know how you feel. If you didn't you wouldn't have neglected me the way you have. (*The thought passes through her mind that she enjoys herself elsewhere than at home on occasions, but she puts it aside.*) Anyone who can let his mother act as

yours has toward me and still neglect his wife for her certainly don't care much. (*She waits for him to make some comment, but he merely stares at her.*) If there's nothing more than that left I'd better let you get a divorce, and—(*The telephone bell rings.*) There she is now! You haven't come soon enough. (*She snaps her teeth savagely.*)

BURTON

[*Appearing at the door.*]

You're wanted on the phone, sir. (KINDELLING *and* BURTON *leave.*)

MRS. ARTHUR DEEKER

[*Speeding north in her machine and noting the lights.*]

It looks as though the Kindellings were home tonight. He must find it dull since he can't take her out anywhere. (*She subsides into her furs.*)

MISS MARTHA BUDD

[*A spinster saleslady, occupying the front room in a boarding house opposite on the side street, preparing to go down to a lonely dinner. From her window she can survey the entire Kindelling home.*]

It is so dreadful to be lonely. I haven't a single

place to go. Another evening of reading. (*She notes the light opposite.*) If I only had a home! Think of all those who are rich and happy.

MR. KITTS

When I was in Havana once the Colonel came down there with his horses and autos. He had an immense sugar plantation among other things.

LAURA

[*Alone, soliloquizing.*]

I know it's she, the devil. Now for one last play. If he goes tonight, after all I've said, all is lost. I might as well give up.

[*She goes to the mirror and back, distrait, a kind of horror of defeat upon her, takes out her handkerchief and begins to cry.*]

KINDELLING

[*Coming in.*]

It's mother—I'm late as it is. (*Looks at his watch.*) I promised to be there at six-thirty. (*He notes her tears.*) Why will you cry, Laura? I haven't changed, really I haven't. (*To himself.*) This is a damned nuisance. (*Comes over and puts his arm about her.*) Why not let this go until tomorrow. I have to go tonight. I promised. She has guests there who are expecting to meet me. But

tomorrow— (*He pauses, disturbed that he has been so foolish as to mention guests and another day.*)

LAURA

[*Taking fire at the thought of pleasant and possibly alluring company while she remains at home. She hopes he will invite her to ride with him.*]

Are you really going? I suppose your dear Althea will be there, the cat! Doesn't the fact that I am here alone while you are away enjoying yourself make any difference to you at all? Don't you love me any more in any way? (*She begins sobbing dramatically.*)

KINDELLING

[*Thinking to himself as* LAURA *weeps.*]

This is really too much. Mother is right. Why should I stick to some one of whom I am tired? I'm sorry—I made a mistake, that's all. Laura whines too much. She's too clinging. She's too sharp tongued. I think when I go tonight I'll stay a long time and see what she does about that. I can give her a hundred thousand eventually. It's the only way. (*He addresses her.*) Now I must go, Laura—I can't get out of it. This is nonsense. I'll come back late in the evening if you wish, but I must go now—really. You mustn't keep me. (*He begins to loose the hand which she has laid on his shoulder.*)

LAURA

[*Realizing that she is in danger of defeat and beginning to moan.*]

Oh, dear! Oooh, dear!

KINDELLING

[*Irritated and therefore firm.*]

Now, Laura, this is ridiculous. Here I have a dinner appointment with my own mother at six-thirty, and at seven or nearly so I am still here, arguing with you. You always begin—just at this time when I have to leave. I haven't time now, and I've got to go. What you say isn't true, and anyway I'm not going to stop and argue it now. Mother isn't as terrible as you think—and anyhow (*he loosens her hand and puts her away gently but firmly*) there's no use in our taking this particular time to settle it.

[*He starts to move, but she clings to him. He forces her hands off and moving to a chaise longue puts her into it.*]

LAURA

[*Hysterically, sensing the import of his departure.*]

Oh, God! Oh, God! He forsakes his own wife for his mother, and another woman, and after only two years! To think that I should come to this. To

think that that cold, scheming cat should be able to separate us—and after all that has been between us! Oh, oh, oh!!!

KINDELLING

[*Seeing an excuse for anger and anxious to use it to effect a permanent separation.*]

You call her a cat?

LAURA

[*Losing her self-control and her tact.*]

Yes, I do. She's a vile, treacherous, cold-hearted, scheming woman, and you know it. She planned to twist you around her finger, and she's done it. You're no better than she is. You're just as anxious to break with me as she is to have you. You're both in a scheme to wreck my life. (*She pauses, realizing she has said too much.*)

KINDELLING

[*Coldly and with an air of injured innocence.*]

Oh, very well—if that's the way you look at it. I don't see that we're very well mated as it is. You go your way and I'll go mine. I'll not stay to listen to your charges. This is the end so far as I'm concerned. (*He steps into the hall and takes down his hat and coat.*)

BURTON

[*Who has overheard much of the storm, appearing to assist him.*]

Will you be coming back before midnight tonight, Mr. Truro?

KINDELLING

[*Irritably.*]

I'll not be back at all tonight, Burton (*to himself*), or ever, I hope.

BURTON

[*Smugly.*]

Very well, sir. (*Fearing the possible approach of* Mrs. Kendelling *he discreetly retreats.*)

LAURA

[*Realizing that she has overplayed her part and that he has a seeming excuse for anger.*]

Oh, Truro, I didn't mean that. I wasn't thinking what I was saying. I was just angry and hurt. (*She sees him pull on his overcoat with a jerk and imagines him temporarily outraged.*) Please don't go. Please don't say you mean to go for good. It was just a slip of the tongue—really it was. I didn't mean it. I know you love me—some, anyhow. Oh, Truro! (*He puts on his hat and pushes his way to the door.*) Oh, Truro! Truro! Please don't go! Please don't! Please tell me that you love me before

you do, anyhow! (*He opens the door and pushes out into the entry way.*) Truro! For God's sake!

KINDELLING

[*Forcefully, irritably, taking full advantage of his chance.*]

Let go! (*He forces her hands loose from about his neck and pushes her back.*) What do you want! All the neighbors to hear you? I've done, I tell you; you're too much for me! (*He pushes her in, pulls the door to, runs down the steps and jumps into the car. To the chauffeur*): Mother's.

LAURA

[*Reopening the door frantically.*]

Truro! Truro! Oh, for God's sake, Truro! Don't leave me! Don't leave me, Truro! Oh, Truro, if you love me— (*She sees him disappear in the snow up street.*)

OFFICER TUBBS

[*Noting the exit.*]

But it's a beautiful home they have, servants and autos, and all that.

MR. KITTS

And twenty millions when his mother dies.

OFFICER TUBBS

And twenty millions.

THE SPINSTER

[*In her front room, noting* KINDELLING'S *departure.*]

A man to love you! To take you in his arms in front of a warm fire!

LAURA

[*Twisting her hands feverishly*]. But he must come back! He will! He can't mean that—so soon—— Oh, my God! My God! (*She runs feverishly to dress and follow him.*]

A HAND ORGAN

[*Wheeling into position in front of the house.*]

Everybody's doin' it, doin' it, doin' it—
Everybody's doin' it, doin' it, doin' it—

BURTON

[*From the library window, left front.*]

Hi do wish these 'ere 'and organ men would stop playing in front of hour residence. They're always a doing of it, and Hi've spoken to the hofficers 'ereabouts more an once. Wretched beggars! (*He frowns darkly.*)

MR. KITTS

[*Realizing the flight of time.*]
Well, good-night, officer.

OFFICER TUBBS

[*Staring at the hand-organ man, but, enjoying the melody, permitting him to remain.*]
Good-night to you, Mr. Kitts.

CURTAIN

VII

"OLD RAGPICKER"

Characters

Brogan,
Mullarky, } *Officers of adjoining beats.*
"Old Ragpicker."
An Old Woman.
A Grocer Boy.

Children and Passers-by.

"OLD RAGPICKER"

AN EPISODE

Scene

A street corner in the lower west side in New York City. Low red brick three and four story buildings make the prospect on either hand, corners almost invariably being made into stores. In the front of one of them and next to a store stand two garbage cans conspicuously full.

On the corner under the wooden awning of one of two stores diagonally opposite to each other two policemen meet. One, the officer of the beat, is an oldish man, well over forty, genial, contemptuous. He stands twirling his club and looking indifferently about him. The other, younger still, a brute of a boy, but polished as to shoes and buttons, and conspicuous for his very large hands pinched into snow white cotton gloves, is equally bored. They salute.

Time—*Noon of a raw, January day.*

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Contemptuously and wearily, desiring to show off before his fellow officer.*]

This is a hell of a beat, this is! This is a hell of a beat. I've chased two cats out of a garbage can since morning and made one drunk move on. This is a hell of a beat, this is! (*He twirls his stick.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Also contemptuously, but with a devil-may-care air, twirling his club like a baton.*]

Whaddy yah want, anyhow? What're yuh lookin' for, a murder? We don't have anythin' like that down here. This is a respectable neighborhood, this is. We have nice people here. None o' your Brownsville, Tottenville, Canarsie Shinannigans around here. These people go to church on Sunday. They're respectable. If yuh want any o' them other things you'd better come over to my side o' town where the real ones lives.

OFFICER BROGAN

Whadda *you* know about real ones? Ever pounded the pavements in Dugan's flats yet? Ever walked Hell's Kitchen between one and six in the mornin'? When you've handled one of them beats

for a year or so you can talk. I've been in riots, I have.

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*With a faint curl of the lip.*]
Riots?

OFFICER BROGAN

Yes, riots. Real live riots, an' all over a can o' beer, or a stranger passin' the time o' day to a kid. None o' your Jackrabbit sports in them neighborhoods, I can tell you. Real live riots with the reserves out—an' heads broken for a block aroun'. See this arm? (*He pulls up a coat sleeve and bares his wrist.*) That's where I damned near had me left tendon cut. The nut was makin' for my neck. If he'd 'a' caught me he'd 've opened me juggler, an' I'd a been a dead one sure. As it was I threw me hand up like this and caught it right there. Whadyyah know!

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Interested.*]
Well, whaddyja do?

OFFICER BROGAN

Whaddid I do? Whaddid I do? Yuh better ask me! But I'm not tellin' what I did. I want to stay on the force for a while, yet, I guess. (*He smiles as*

who should say, "I committed endless horrors!") But if he'd ha' reached me juggler I wouldn't be here now, to be tellin' about it.

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Condescendingly.*]
Pretty tough, eh?

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Shoving his thumbs into his belt.*]
But this here beat, I never saw the like of this. I might as well be on dooty in Central Park watchin' the sparrows. There ain't nothin' goin' on here. I can hardly keep me eyes open half the time.

[*He takes out his stick again and twirls it disdainfully.*]

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Idly, but with a resigned air.*]
Well, it's kinder tough. I used to do time over here. Ever see old man Windhorst that owns the brewery? He lives up the street here.

[*He jerks a thumb over his shoulder.*]

OFFICER BROGAN

Sure. I seen him loads of times. He always bids me the time o' day. Nice old feller, eh? They say he's wort' millions.

OFFICER MULLARKY

That ain't no merry jest, either, I guess. He give ol' Bealstock when he had the beat here last Christmas fifteen dollars! An' him ownin' six houses in Hoboken! Whaddy yuh know? But looket what's comin' up the street, will yuh? Get onto the walk—an' the pants! An' no overcoat, either. Gee! But it's tough!

OFFICER BROGAN

That? Oh, that's only "Old Ragpicker." That's what the kids call him aroun' here. He don't amount to nothin'. He's harmless. He's been aroun' here as long as I've been here, an' for four or five years before, they say. Didn'jah ever see him before?

OFFICER MULLARKY

He's a new one on me! He's nutty, ain't he?

OFFICER BROGAN

Is he nutty? His gallery's clean empty. He sleeps over on the water front, under one of them docks. He's got a hole over there that he creeps into that's somepin awful. I followed him one night before I knew who he was, thinkin' he might be a light-fingered gent, stagein' it. But I was wrong. Say, yuh ought to see the place he lives in, though. It's a wonder! I don't see how

he keeps from freezin' in this weather. Rags, an' dirt, an' wet piles! I onct thought o' takin' him up to be kind to him, but I changed muh mind. He's makin' a livin', an' he's as well off here as he would be there. (*They continue to gaze up the street.*) He picks rags an' tins an' bottles out o' the ash cans. All the junk men aroun' here know him. They don't give him very much for them, I expect, but they buy from him. He never steals nothin', I guess. Once I seen him eatin' a piece o' bread outen an ash can, an' another time a potato. It's tough, but what kin yuh do? I tried to give him a dime onct, but he wouldn't take it. I couldn't get nothin' outa him. He just looked at me.

OFFICER MULLARKY

He wouldn' take the dime?

OFFICER BROGAN

Naaa-a-a-a!

OFFICER MULLARKY

He's bats alright.

[*Enter* "OLD RAGPICKER." *He is a man between sixty and seventy, frowsy, lean, dirty. A mop of grayish white hair protrudes from under a battered felt hat, the brim of which sags down on all sides. His face is long and seamed and yellow. His eyes are bleary and*

the rims sore and red with dust and cold. His hands are long and clawlike and dirty. His coat and trousers mere torn and fluttering rags, showing other coats and trousers underneath. His shoes are loose, mouldy and broken. He walks with a swinging limp, a great hemp bag over his shoulder in which are stuffed cans, bottles, and rags in lumpy confusion.]

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Spying the two garbage cans beyond the officers, and pausing. He seems totally unconscious of anyone, passes, looks about, looks into the cans, then turns his back to the wall and drops his pack. He clears his throat feebly, then stirs in the cans.*]

Eh hem! Eh hem!

OFFICER BROGAN

Look at that now! Will yuh? An' them clothes! Can yuh beat it?

OFFICER MULLARKY

The limit, eh?

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*As he picks over one thing and another, finally extracting a tomato can and a milk bottle.*]

They always eat tomatoes. Yes. They always eat tomatoes. Yes! Lots of tomatoes! It's cold. My hands are cold, and my feet. Yes. Once they were warm. Yes. Once they were warm enough. Yes. Now they are cold. No matter. (*He reaches down and finds another bottle, this time a small cream one.*) Yes. That's a milk bottle and this is a cream bottle. Cream. It's a long time since I've had that. That'll bring me one cent. Yes. And this'll bring me a cent. (*He holds it up.*) Once I had milk and cream, and a farm, too, and horses and cows. Yes, I did. Once I had horses and cows and pigs. People worked for me in those days, men did. Yes, they did. You wouldn't believe it to see me now, would you? Well, they did. They worked for me. Yes, they did. (*He stirs about and brings up another tomato can.*) Another tomato can! So many of 'em eat tomatoes. Yes, they do. So many of 'em eat tomatoes. Yes. So many eat tomatoes. (*He stares about vacantly.*)

[*A young woman in a trim business suit goes by giving him a wide berth. An old man in a black fur-trimmed coat enters, sending him a sidelong glance, and goes on. An old woman*

in black enters, a market basket on her arm, passes a few steps and returns.]

OLD WOMAN

You poor man! Aren't you cold? Don't you want to come to my house up here and let me give you a coat? I have an old one that would fit you I'm sure.

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Surveying her with only slightly comprehending eyes.*]

A coat? Yes. I understand. A coat. I'm cold and you want to give me a coat. I understand. Yes. Once I was warm, but now, now I'm cold. Yes. Once I lived in a cellar under a dock. Yes. Once I picked rags and bottles and tin cans, but now, now I don't do that any more. No. Not now. Now I'm a manufacturer like I was. Rags and bottles and tin. Rags and bottles and tin. Then I got cold and couldn't do it any more. You understand. I picked rags and bottles and tin and then I got cold. But I'm all right now. I'm all right now. That was a long time before I got poor. That was after I got old and lost my fortune, and my wife died. Yes, yes, that's how it was. I remember now. That's how it was. That was after I got old—but now. (*He turns to look into the can again.*)

THE OLD WOMAN

Don't you want the coat, mister? Don't you want me to give it to you?

[*He pays no more attention to her and she looks about confused. Enter a grocer boy with a basket on his arm.*]

THE GROCER BOY

[*Pausing and surveying the scene.*]

What're yuh tryin' to do, lady? Give 'im a coat? He don't un'erstan' yuh, lady. Yuh can't do nuttin' wit' him. He's crazy. Dat's all. His name's Old Ragpicker. Dat's what dey call 'im aroun' here. He's aroun' here all de time, more or less. I seen 'im often. Yuh can't do nuttin' wit' him, missus. He's bats. He's light in the upper story. Nobody home, missus. (*He moves on.*)

OLD WOMAN

The poor old thing! The poor old thing! (*She begins to move on.*) Goin' around in this January weather with no coat on. It's dreadful. I should think that some of these charity societies that are always talking so much would do something. I should think there'd be someone to do something. (*She spies the two policemen and approaches them.*) Can't you do something for that poor old man, offi-

cer? I should think that the charity societies or someone could do something. (*She sniffs righteously and defiantly.*)

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Very respectfully.*]

I don't think you can do very much for him, madame. He's not in his right mind, anyhow. He's always around like that.

THE OLD WOMAN

[*With considerable asperity.*]

Well, I should think somebody might do something. He won't pay any attention to me. What are you police good for if you won't do something? I'm sure somebody ought to do something, even if I can't make him understand. The idea! Letting him pick out of a garbage can at his age and in his condition! It's a shame, that's what it is! (*She goes off heatedly.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

Well, listen to old fuss and feathers, will you! Whaddy yuh know? Ye'd think we made 'im do it!

OFFICER BROGAN

Aw, they're all bats, these old ones, every one of them. They make me sick.

[*Enter a crowd of school children, newly excused from a nearby school. They come running and shouting. As they note* "OLD RAGPICKER" *some of them come running, but some of them, seeing the policemen, pass on. Others, not so easily overawed, remain longer. Finally all go out except two boys and a girl.*]

FIRST BOY

[*A lad of ten, sarcastically.*]
Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Look at the ragpicker!

SECOND BOY

He's picking out bottles and cans. Here's a can for you!

[*He picks up a can and throws it. It cuts* "OLD RAGPICKER'S" *hand. He bends over it in pain.*]

THE SCHOOL GIRL

You nasty thing! Aren't you mean! I'd think you'd be ashamed of yourself. Nasty Irish! (*She strikes at the boy.*)

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Noting the deed of the boy and starting toward him.*]

Come now, get out of here, you little devil! Beat it! If I catch you around here again I'll fix you.

[*He shakes his club at him.*]

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Slightly sympathetic.*]

They're the limit, these kids. He hurt his hand, I guess.

OFFICER BROGAN

The little devil! If I could catch him I'd pan him.

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Looking at his hand in a futile way and touching it.*]

They're always hitting me, these boys. They never seem to care what they throw at me. They hurt, I tell you, those old cans! (*He puts his hand to his mouth, then turns to the garbage cans as if to continue his search. Suddenly a wild look comes into his eyes.*) Now I'll tell you something! You let me alone! I'm not crazy! You say I'm crazy but I'm not crazy! I was crazy. I did lose my mind. But I lost my money! I lost my wife! I lost my boy! I lost my friends! (*He sobs convulsively for a moment or two, then as suddenly stops.*) But I'm not crazy now. I got better, I tell you. That's why I'm out. I got better. I live by myself now.

I'm all alone where I can watch the water go by and the boats and the clouds. That's why I live there. I'm not crazy. (*His voice and manner soften.*) I like the water and the boats and the clouds. I'm all right. That's why I live alone. I don't bother anybody. I don't ask for anything, do I? (*His manner becomes more intense.*) Why don't you let me alone, you little devils? Why don't you let me alone, eh? I'm not crazy. I'm just cold. That's what's the matter with me. I'm cold. I know what's the matter with me. I'm lonely. (*He returns to the ash cans.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Interested.*]
He talks a lot, don't he?

OFFICER BROGAN

Sure. He always goes on like that. I've seen him do it lots of times. There's no harm in him, though. He just talks. You'd talk too if you had your hand cut.

ANOTHER STREET BOY

[*Aroused by the spectacle but withdrawing to a safe distance.*]
Ragpicker! Ragpicker!

A SCHOOL GIRL

[*Equally interested and amused.*]
Goodness! Look at his shoes!

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Picking out another can.*]
Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Yes. That's what they call me. Ragpicker! Yes! That's what they call me. They throw stones at me, they do. They hit me once here—(*he puts his hand to his head above his ear*). They hurt me and I had to run. They're devils, those boys. They're devils! Yes, they are. (*He straightens up and the wild look comes into his eyes.*) Now you let me alone, I tell you. You let me be, do you hear? You cut my hand, you did. Why do you want to throw stones at me? I'm an old man, I am. Now you let me be.

[*The light in his eyes subsides completely. He returns to the garbage cans.*]

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Observing him narrowly.*]
Some other kids must have been throwing stones at him somewhere.

OFFICER MULLARKY

Sure he seems to be goin' on a good deal to me.

[*Ruefully.*]

But that was a long time ago before I was old and cold, before I got bad again, I remember. The devils! They cut me. (*He pulls up a small brass measuring cup, broken and dented, and a whiskey flask with a metal top to it. Pausing and examining the flask.*) Yes, some of them drink. That's the way. When you're old it doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't count. Nothing matters. You can drink if you want to when you're old. It may keep you warm. It would me if I could get it. (*He rummages again.*) But I'm old now, and I don't mind. No, I don't mind. (*He finds a small brass rod in the second can.*) Here's a few cents, now. Brass is worth fifteen cents a pound and copper twenty. This metal cap, now—(*he unscrews it from the whiskey bottle and puts it in his bag with the cup*)—is worth a cent anyhow. I found a pair of rubber shoes yesterday. Two of them. Rubber is worth eight cents a pound. Small bottles are worth four cents a dozen if they're the same size. (*He pauses and his mood changes.*) Oh yes, once I was young. Yes. I was young and used to sing, too. Yes, I remember.

[*He begins singing in a cracked falsetto with no melody at all.*]

Oh heigh ho!
It's marching we go.

It's marching, it's marching the boys you go,
Oh ho ho! Oh ho ho!
Marching so the boys do go.
[*He ceases and begins mumbling again.*]

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Nonchalantly.*]
Wouldn't yuh think now that there'd be someone related to an old screw like that that'd look after him? Here he is roamin' around without even a friend and there ain't any one that knows his name. I'll bet he don't know it himself, if you get right down to it. It's funny, a nut like that without anybody to look after him.

OFFICER BROGAN

Well, if he's bats maybe they don't know where he is. I never thought of that.
[*They contemplate him speculatively.*]

OFFICER MULLARKY

There're a lot of cases like that in the papers. How would it do if we ragged him a little, eh? He might come across with his real name. We might find out somepin about him. Whaddy yuh say, huh?

OFFICER BROGAN

Oh, all right. I'm game. Sure. It can't do no harm. We better scare the kids away first though, and then go after him. (*They make a demonstration in force . . . to the children.*) Come on now, git out o' here. All of you! Beat it! Git, now! Quick! Get along or we'll run you all in. (*They shoo them away.*)

CHORUS OF CHILDREN

[*Defiantly.*]

Oh wow wow wow! Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Wow! Wow! Wow! Wooooooooow!

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Coming forward and touching the* RAGPICKER *on the arm.*]

Here, old sport. Stop a minute. Hold on, now. What's your name? Who are yuh? Whaddyuh got in that bag, eh? What's your name, an' what're yuh doin'? (*He attempts to look wise and serious.*)

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Straightening up and seeming to recognize them for a moment. As he does so he quails and a troubled light comes into his eyes, but this passes after a few moments and he is as he was before.*]

I—I—was picking bottles out of the garbage can-here, sir. That was all I was doing, sir. Nothing more, sir, no sir, nothing more. Just bottles and cans and old rags, if there are any. Nothing more, sir. That's all, sir. (*He stares uncertainly before him.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Gaily and with condescension.*]

Sure, that's all right, old sport. We know all about that. It don't make no difference about the bottles. What we want to know is—who are yuh, anyway? What's your name? Where'd yuh come from, eh? Kin yuh tell us that now? Where'd yuh come from and what's your name, eh? (*He lays an encouraging hand on his shoulder.*)

OFFICER BROGAN

Your name, sure, that's it? What's your name, now? Come!

"OLD RAGPICKER"

Name? Name? Yes, my name! What is my name? Let me see. (*He fingers his coatsleeve aimlessly and picks at his buttons.*) I had a name, let me see now. (*He puts his hands to his brow and kinks his forehead while the officers contemplate him silently.*) My name? My name? What was my name? I had a name. It just slips me now for the

moment but it will come back to me. I'm sure of that. It'll come back to me. My name. My name. What is my name? (*He stares vacantly.*)

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Heavily.*]

Well, can't you remember it, sport? Sure you got a name. Don't yuh know what people called yuh before yuh came down here? Can't you remember? Where were yuh before yuh came down here? Come on now, think! Where were yuh before yuh came down here? Come on, now? What was your name? (*He beams on him encouragingly.*)

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Apparently straining to think.*]

I can't seem to remember where I was. No, sir, not just at the moment, sir, I can't. It'll all come back to me though if you'll just give me a little time. It always does. My name! My name! (*He snaps his fingers helplessly.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Gallantly and tolerantly.*]

Come on now and try, old Skeezicks. That's a good old sport. Try hard.

"OLD RAGPICKER"

I'll tell you how it is. When you get old it don't seem to make so much difference any more, don't you see? Nothing really matters. You don't have to eat so much and it don't seem to make so much difference whether you're warm or not. I never seem cold now. No sir, really, I never think of it, you know. Once I had a factory, yes I did. I had three hundred people working for me. That was in eighty-six, before the panic. Oh those were great times. I made woollen blankets in those days—and jeans—and I made a lot of money. Yes, I was very successful. I had my horses and carriages, and my children went to school,—all my children—and some of the neighbors'. There was a big demand for those things then. You can't imagine. Then I had two fires, and the trusts came along, and my wife died, and my boy, and I got—I got—I got— (*He begins to sob again.*) You can't imagine what a difference it made, all those things going so fast. Oh, a great difference, yes, sir. But it's all the same now. I'm just as happy.

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Still very gaily.*]

Oh, yuh're happy, are yuh? Well, that's good. But how about your name now? Can't yuh remember that?

"OLD RAGPICKER"

Name? Name? (*He looks about vaguely.*) My name? That's funny. It's gone completely again. (*He beats his head foolishly.*) I can't seem to think. (*Half sobbing.*) I—can't seem to think. I—I—have a name, but what is it? (*He stops crying and stands opening and shutting his hand.*)

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*With a faint trace of sympathy.*]

Sure it's funny yuh can't remember that, old sport. Yuh can remember about your factory all right. What was the name on the factory? Can't yuh remember that?

"OLD RAGPICKER"

Factory? Factory? What factory was it? I don't remember any factory.

OFFICER BROGAN

Will yuh listen to that, now! One minute he remembers a factory an' the next minute he don't. Yuh don't suppose he kin be stringin' us, do yuh?

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Sternly.*]

Look here, ol' feller, none o' yer con, now. Cut out the bull, dyah hear? None o' yer slick tricks. Out wi' yer name. Who are yuh? Where dyah come from? Gimme yer name damn quick now, or we'll lock yuh up. Yuh don't want tuh go to jail, do yuh? Dyuh want to go to jail? (*He leans toward him threateningly.*)

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*At first frightened by his manner but subsiding into a dreamy state.*]

Jail? Jail? Is it warm there? (*He begins to look around him.*) Name? Name? It's funny, though, I can never think of it, or of hers, or of his, or of anybody's. They're all gone. Well, it doesn't matter. When yer old it doesn't really matter, does it? (*He smiles benignly.*)

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Quite taken aback by the smile.*]

Whaddyah know about that? Kin yuh beat it? If I thought he was stringin' us I'd beat him up, but I don't. He's clean dips, nutty, empty. (*He lifts his finger to his forehead suggestively.*) All gone. Empty as a can.

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*To* BROGAN, *but looking at* "OLD RAGPICKER" *suspiciously.*]

I don't know about that. I don't know whether he is or not. He might be foolin' us at that. Yuh never kin tell about these old nuts. (*Aloud.*) Do yuh think it would do any good if we took him to the station and locked him up for a while? Maybe he'd git his name back sittin' in a cell, eh? Whaddyah say, Brogan? Dyah think that 'ud brighten him up any? (*He looks at* "OLD RAGPICKER" *to see if his remarks have had any effect, but they have not.*) Come along then. (*He takes him by the arm.*) We'll see what a few days in jail'll do. (*He starts to pull him.*)

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Sweetly.*]

Is it warm there?

OFFICER BROGAN

[*Who has seen* "OLD RAGPICKER" *about too long.*]

Cut it, Bill, it won't do no good. Can't yah see he's nuts? Yuh can't scare him. He ain't right. Besides, the sergeant won't stand for it. He knows him. We'd better let him go. He's light in the upper story. That's all. There's no use runnin' him in.

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*Irritably, but mock pleasantly.*]

All right then, old Skeezicks, I'm goin' to let yuh go, but beat it now! Git yer bag up and dust along. Yuh kin unerstan' that all right, can't yuh? Yuh don't need to be told that twice, I'll bet. Well, git yer bag an' mosey, now. Mosey! Yuh've got all yuh kin git out of this can, anyway. (*He smiles broadly and gives him a hearty shove.*)

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Fumbling at his bag and looking around.*]

Yes, I must be going now, that's so. I must be going. Yes. (*He begins to gather the neck of his bag into his hands.*) If I just had a few more cans. It's cold, I tell you.

A PASSING STREET BOY

[*Seeing the conference over.*]

Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Look at the ragpicker!

OFFICER MULLARKY

[*To* OFFICER BROGAN, *strolling away.*]

He is nutty for fair, I guess, eh!

OFFICER BROGAN

[*As they exit.*]

Sure he's nutty. I told you that.

THE PASSING STREET BOY

[*Repeating.*]

Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Look at the ragpicker!

"OLD RAGPICKER"

[*Still struggling to place his bag on his back and listening to the cry of the street boy as it dies away.*]

Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Yes, that's it. Now I remember. That's my name. Ragpicker! Ragpicker! Yes, that's what they call me. Ragpicker! Ragpicker! That's my name. That's what they wanted to know. Why wouldn't I think of it when they wanted to know it? It was on my card case. Three thousand pounds of wool. Ragpicker! Yes! Ragpicker. Yes. Ragpicker. Now I remember. Ragpicker. Yes. Why couldn't I remember that when they wanted to know? Ragpicker! Yes. Old Ragpicker. Yes. Old Ragpicker. Yes.

[*As he mumbles he slowly gets his bag placed on his back and trudges off.*]

CURTAIN

It seems, in connection with the play, "Laughing Gas" (page 83), that some of the effects of nitrous oxide gas (laughing gas) have been observed before.

In a pamphlet published in 1874 at Amsterdam, New York, by Benjamin Paul Blood, entitled "The Anæsthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy," Mr. Blood wrote:

"Of this condition (a state of intense illumination or philosophic perception), although it may have been obtained otherwise, I know only by the use of anæsthetic agents. After experiments ranging over nearly fourteen years I affirm—what any man may prove at will—that there is an invariable and reliable condition (or uncondition) ensuing about the instant of recall from anæsthetic stupor to sensible observation, or "coming to" in which the genius of being is revealed; but because it can not be remembered in the normal condition it is lost altogether through the infrequency of anæsthetic treatment in any individual case ordinarily, and buried amid the hum of returning common sense under the epitaph of all illumination: "this is a queer world." Yet I have warned others to expect this wonder on entering anæsthetic slumber, and none so cautioned has failed to report to me of it in terms which assured me of its realization. I have spoken with various persons who induce anæsthesis (dentists, surgeons, etc.) who had observed that many patients at the moment of recall seem as having made a startling yet somehow matter of course (and even grotesque) discovery in their own nature, and try to speak of it, but invariably fail in a last mood of introspection. Of what astonishes them it is hard to give or receive intimation, but I think most persons who have tested it will accept this as the central point of the illumination: that sanity is not the basic quality of intelligence, but a mere condition which is variable and like the humming of a wheel, goes up and down the musical gamut according to a physical activity; and that only insanity is formal or contrasted thought while the naked life is realized only outside of sanity altogether; and it is the instant contrast of this "tasteless water of souls" with formal thought as we "come to" that leaves in the patient an astonishment that the awful mystery of life is at last but a homely and a common thing, and that aside from mere formality the majestic and the absurd are of equal dignity."

Sometime subsequent to this, but before 1896, judging by the dates of the volume in which his comment appears, the attention of William James, Professor of Psychology at Harvard, was called to this, for, in his volume, "The Will to Believe" (Longmans Green and Co.—1897) as a footnote to his essay entitled "Some Hegelisms," occurs the following:

"Since the preceding article was written (Some Hegelisms), some observations on the effect of nitrous-oxide-gas-intoxication which I

was prompted to make by reading the pamphlet called The Anæsthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy, by Benjamin Paul Blood, Amsterdam, N. Y., 1874, have made me understand better than ever before both the strength and the weakness of Hegel's philosophy. I strongly urge others to repeat the experiment, which, with pure gas, is harmless enough. The effects will of course vary with the individual from time to time; but it is probable that in the former case, as in the latter, a generic resemblance will obtain. With me, as with every other person of whom I have heard, the keynote of the experience is the tremendously exciting sense of an intense metaphysical illumination. Truth lies open to the view in depth beneath depth of almost blinding evidence. The mind sees all the logical relations of being with an apparent subtlety and instantaneity to which its normal consciousness offers no parallel; only as sobriety returns, the feeling of insight fades, and one is left staring vacantly at a few disjointed words and phrases, as one stares at a cadaverous-looking snowpeak from which the sunset glow has just fled, or at the black cinder left by an extinguished brand.

The immense emotional sense of *reconciliation* which characterizes the 'maudlin' stage of alcoholic drunkenness,—a stage which seems silly to lookers-on, but the subjective rapture of which probably constitutes a chief part of the temptation to the vice,—is well known. The center and periphery of things seem to come together. The ego and its objects, the meum and the tuum, are one. Now this, only a thousand-fold enhanced, was the effect upon me of the gas; and its first result was to make peal through me with unutterable power the conviction that Hegelism was true after all and that the deepest convictions of my intellect hitherto were wrong. Whatever idea or representation occurred to the mind was seized by the same logical forceps, and served to illustrate the same truth; and that truth was that every opposition, among whatsoever things, vanishes in a higher unity in which it is based; that all contradictions, so-called, are but differences; that all differences are of degree; that all degrees are of a common kind; that unbroken continuity is of the essence of being; and that we are literally in the midst of *an infinite,* to perceive the existence of which is the utmost we can attain. Without the *same* as a basis how could strife occur? Strife presupposes something to be striven about; and in this common topic, the same for both parties, the differences merge. From the hardest contradiction to the tenderest diversity of verbiage differences evaporate; *yes* and *no* agree at least in being assertions; a denial of a statement is but another mode of stating the same, contradiction can only occur of the same thing,—all opinions are thus synonyms, are synonymous, are the same. But the same phrase by difference of emphasis is two; and here again difference and no-difference merge in one.

It is impossible to convey an idea of the torrential character of the identification of opposites as it streams through the mind in this experience. I have sheet after sheet of phrases dictated or written during the intoxication, which to sober readers seem meaningless drivel, but which in the moment of transcribing were fused in the fire of infinite rationality. God and devil, good and evil, life and death, I and you, sober and drunk, matter and form, black and white, quantity and quality, shiver of ecstasy and shudder of horror, vomiting and swallowing, inspiration and expiration, fate and reason, great and small, extent and intent, joke and earnest, tragic and comic, and fifty other contrasts

figure in these pages in the same monotonous way. The mind saw how each term *belonged* to its contrast through a knife edged moment of transition which *it* effected, and which, perennial and eternal, was the *nunc stans* of life. The thought of mutual implication of the parts in the bare form of a judgment of opposition, as 'nothing—but' 'no more—than,' 'only—if,' etc., produced a perfect delirium of theoretic rapture. And at last, when definite ideas to work on came slowly, the mind went through the mere *form* of recognizing sameness in identity by contrasting the same word with itself, differently emphasized, or shorn of its initial letter. Let me transcribe a few sentences:

What's mistake but kind of take?

What's nausea but a kind -ausea?

Sober, drunk, *-unk,* astonishment.

Everything can become the subject of criticism—how criticise without something to criticise?

Agreement—disagreement!!

Emotion—motion!!!

Die away from, *from,* die away (without from).

Reconciliation of opposites; sober, drunk, all the same!

Good and evil reconciled in a laugh!

It escapes, it escapes!

But—

What escapes—WHAT escapes?

Emphasis, EMphasis; there must be some emphasis in order for there to be a phasis.

No verbiage can give it, because the verbiage is the *other.*

*In*coherent, coherent—same.

And it fades! And it's infinite! AND it's infinite!

If it wasn't *going* why should you hold on to it?

Don't you see the difference, don't you see the identity?

Constantly opposites united!

The same me telling you to write and not to write!

Extreme—extreme, extreme! Within the *ex*tensity that 'extreme' contains is contained the *'extreme'* of *in*tensity.

Something, and *other* than that thing!

Intoxication, and *otherness* than intoxication.

Every attempt at betterment,—every attempt at otherment,—is a ——

It fades forever and forever as we move.

There *is* a reconciliation!

Reconciliation—*e*conciliation!

By God how that hurts! By God how it *doesn't* hurt! Reconciliation of two extremes.

By George, nothing but *oth*ing!

That sounds like nonsense, but it is pure *on*sense!

Thought deeper than speech—!

Medical school, divinity school, *school!* SCHOOL! Oh, my God, oh God—oh God!

The most coherent and articulate sentence which came was this:—

There are no differences but differences of degree between different degrees of difference and no difference.

This phrase has the true Hegelian ring, being in fact a regular *sich als sich auf sich selbst beziehende Negativatät.* And true Hegelians will *überhaupt* be able to read between the lines and feel, at any rate, what *possible* ecstasies of cognitive emotion might have bathed these tattered fragments of thought when they were alive. But for the assurance of a certain amount of respect

from them, I should hardly venture to print what must be such caviare to the general.

But now comes the reverse of the medal. What is the principle of unity in all this monotonous rain of instances? Although I did not see it at first, I soon found that it was in each case nothing but the abstract *genus* of which the conflicting terms were opposite species. In other words, although the flood of ontologic *emotion* was Hegelian through and through, the *ground* for it was nothing but the world-old principle that things are the same only so far and no farther than they *are* the same, or partake of a common nature,—the principle that Hegel most tramples underfoot. At the same time the rapture of beholding a process that was infinite, changed (as the nature of the infinitude was realized by the mind) into the sense of a dreadful and ineluctable fate, with whose magnitude every finite effort is incommensurable and in the light of which whatever happens is indifferent. This instantaneous revulsion of mood from rapture to horror is, perhaps, the strongest emotion I have ever experienced. I got it repeatedly when the inhalation was continued long enough to produce incipient nausea; and I cannot but regard it as the normal and inevitable outcome of the intoxication, if sufficiently prolonged. A pessimistic fatalism, depth within depth of impotence and indifference, reason and silliness united, not in a higher synthesis, but in the fact that whatever you choose it is all one,—this is the upshot of a revelation that began so rosy bright.

Even when the process stops short of this ultimatum, the reader will have noted from the phrases quoted how often it ends by losing the clue. Something 'fades,' 'escapes'; and the feeling of insight is changed into an intense one of bewilderment, puzzle, confusion, astonishment. I know no more singular sensation than this intense bewilderment, with nothing particular left to be bewildered at save the bewilderment itself. It seems, indeed, a *causa sui,* or 'spirit become its own object.'

My conclusion is that the togetherness of things in a common world, the law of sharing, of which I have said so much, may, when perceived, engender a very powerful emotion; that Hegel was so unusually susceptible to this emotion throughout his life that its gratification became his supreme end, and made him tolerably unscrupulous as to the means that he employed; that *indifferentism* is the true outcome of every view of the world which makes infinity and continuity to be its essence, and that pessimistic or optimistic attitudes pertain to the mere accidental subjectivity of the moment; finally, that the identification of contradictories, so far from being the self-developing process that Hegel supposes, is really a self consuming process, passing from the less to the more abstract, and terminating either in a laugh in the ultimate nothingness, or in a mood of vertiginous amazement at a meaningless infinity."

It is needless to say, I presume, that "Laughing Gas" was not suggested or inspired by either of these comments. My attention was not called to them until two months after my own work had been published.

THE AUTHOR.

New York, April, 1916.

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